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Modern Business

A SERIES OF TEXTS PREPARED AS PART OF THE MODERN BUSINESS COURSE AND SERVICE OF THE ALEXANDER HAMILTON INSTITUTE

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Modern Business

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BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

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MODERN BUSINESS

VOLUME 12

ALEXANDER HAMILTON INSTITUTE
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PREFACE

Business correspondence is a practical art. As such, it is best learned in actual experience. But experience may or may not be a good teacher. Therefore, the aim of this volume is to supplement experience to the extent of helping the reader as much as possible, and as rapidly as possible, to improve, thru his daily experience as a correspondent, in the art of writing effective letters.

His improvement will depend largely on the kind of thinking he puts into his experience. The best kind of thinking as a means of improvement in pursuing a practical art is always that which reaches the fundamental principles underlying the success of those who are expert practitioners in the art. For this reason an attempt is made in this Text to point out the more fundamental principles involved in the art of writing letters that get the results desired by the writer, and to show by means of examples how these principles are applied. Only such fundamental principles as apply to the writing of all types of letters are considered.

In nearly all cases these fundamental ideas are principles of good salesmanship. The purely rhetorical aspects of business correspondence are considered only in so far as they have weight in making letters

effective. Considerable attention is given to direct sales correspondence, because nearly all the fundamental principles found in successful selling letters apply to letters ordinarily not classed as sales letters. The attitude taken here, however, is that all letters are selling letters in so far as they attempt to make the reader think and act as the writer desires. Salesmanship is essential to the accomplishment of this end.

The letters used as illustrations are taken from actual business practice. The fundamental ideas presented are in accordance with the views of business executives who are, without doubt, expert in the art of writing effective letters. The author is indebted especially to the following: Mr. Frank S. Cunningham, Vice President of Butler Brothers, Chicago; Mr. George B. Everett, General Office Manager of the National Cloak and Suit Company, New York; Mr. L. G. Wright, Managing Editor of *Printers' Ink,* New York; Mr. Nat Olds, Julius Kayser Company, New York; and to Mr. Henry Schott, Publicity Director, Montgomery Ward & Company, Chicago.

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Urbana, Illinois,

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BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

CHAPTER I

EFFECTIVE LETTERS

1. *Modern business correspondence.*—The exigencies of competition in modern business have brought the business letter into a new and brighter light. Business correspondence is now, more than ever before, an instrument of salesmanship. Progressive business concerns are beginning to require that all letters be written with careful consideration of their possible influence on sales. This attitude, which is practical and sound, is due in part to a new conception of the scope of salesmanship.

As explained in the Text on "Salesmanship," the art of selling has the most varied uses. Whenever one man influences another to think and act as he desires, salesmanship is practised. Business correspondence is written to cause the reader to think and act as the writer desires, and in this sense all business letters are selling letters. This practical point of view on business correspondence causes the correspondent to give utmost consideration to the *effect* his letter will have on the reader. Effectiveness rather than correctness is his aim. He is interested in good form, technic

and rhetorical correctness of expression only in so far as they help him to produce the desired *effect* upon the reader.

The *effect* desired is always one that will have, either directly or indirectly, a favorable influence on sales. Effective letters, therefore, are those that tend either to promote sales directly or to increase the good-will that leads to increased sales. Whether or not this influence is direct or indirect makes little difference. The point is, that in business every letter has *some* influence on sales. The degree of influence any letter has in promoting sales depends on the amount of good salesmanship used in writing it.

2. *Place of correspondence in salesmanship.*—The basic principles involved in writing effective letters, therefore, are the principles which govern successful salesmanship. The correspondent is only one degree less a salesman than the firm's traveling representative. The following analysis of the scope of salesmanship shows the place of correspondence in this field.

I. Oral salesmanship:
   - A. When the seller goes to the buyer
   - B. When the buyer goes to the seller.

II. Written salesmanship:
   - A. When a piece of copy is written to an individual
   - B. When a piece of copy is written to more than one person.

In this classification all general business correspondence is included under II. A, while the form letter would fall under II. B, in close relation to advertising copy. But the point here is that business letters are effective because they are written by writers who either consciously or unconsciously apply principles of good salesmanship in their choice of what is said and how it is said.

3. *"Keystone" principle.*—Perhaps the first of all the selling principles that apply in writing effective letters is that everything written should be criticised from the standpoint of its effect on the reader. When a young man closed a letter of application for a position with the statement, "I hope to hear from you because I want to connect with a business located in your city," he did not take the point of view of the prospective employer. He did not forsee the effect of indefiniteness, or the advantage of an indication of interest in the particular job that was open. If he had read over his letter and had applied, as best he could, the prospective employer's point of view, he might easily have foreseen the ineffectiveness of his closing statement. Possessing and using a knowledge of the reader's point of view may be termed the "keystone" principle in the art of writing effective letters.

4. *Necessity of practical imagination.*—Any letter will serve to show the application or the non-application of the principle of "practical imagination." The following illustration happens to be a sales letter, but the principle applies in writing all letters. If there is

a "secret of success" in writing effective letters, it is this principle of adopting the reader's point of view. Did the writer of the following letter, sent out by an automobile supply company, apply it?

Dear Sir:

According to our records you are the owner of a Ford car. Now you may not need a new inner tube, but just the same we are sending one to you, and to 99 other men, because we want you to try it out for us. It is going to your address by parcel post, prepaid. Maybe it's there now.

Here's the story. This inner tube is going to be listed in our new 1916 Automobile Supply Catalog for $2.85. It is one of the sensational values we show. It is different; we think it is better; but before we crow about it we want your opinion.

Now this is what we want you to do. Place the Riverside Inner Tube on your Ford. Drive about as you please, test it fully. If at the end of 30 days you do not think the Riverside a real good tube for the money, throw it away and tell us on the back of this letter why you did so. If you do find it satisfactory, send us $2.00 with this letter, and any comment you have to make.

Now understand, you are to be the only judge and we want you to be critical. If the inner tube is not as good as we think it is we want to know it. But we hope that it will prove itself to be an exceptional value and will serve to acquaint you with our ability to save you money on automobile supplies.

After thirty days—will you please let us know the result of your test?

Thank you.

Yours very truly,

Would the owner of a Ford car who received this letter and the inner tube in the same mail, be likely to do as requested? If one can appreciate *accurately*

how such a letter would impress him as a prospective buyer, typical of the men to whom this letter was sent, he has practical imagination of the sort that is the fundamental basis of effective letter writing.

The letter quoted was not successful, because the writer lacked practical foresight concerning the reader's point of view regarding the proposal, or failed to exercise it. This principle—to see yourself and your concern and your proposition as the reader does and to take full advantage of this ability to see thru another's eyes—is the very essence of good salesmanship.

5. *Application of this principle.*—Now consider the letter just quoted—from the reader's point of view. It is correct in mechanical form and expression. The fault lies deeper than appearance, as is nearly always the case when letters are not effective. It reads smoothly. Its tone is effective. It looked good to the writer. From *his* point of view it was an excellent letter, with life and individuality in it. He wanted to know why it had failed. Therefore, he took time to go out and talk to several Ford owners about it.

His inquiries revealed to him that he had been asking Ford owners to take a great amount of trouble in order to *help him* find out whether or not his article was any good. He then understood why no trials of the inner tube had been made except in the case of one man who at the time happened to need a new one, This man had sent two dollars for it by return mail without comment. Many of the hundred tubes were

returned immediately. A few of them were kept until the recipients might need them—longer than thirty days in most cases.

The selling plan in this letter was ineffective; but from the reader's point of view it has faults in addition to those involved in its selling plan. For example, the first part of the first paragraph is unnecessary, while part of it is unfortunate in its effect. Perhaps the words "just the same," sound natural and sincere, but they cause the reader to feel that the letter attempts to force him to do something he might not want to do. All buyers dislike to be driven.

When he had learned *conditions as they exist, from the point of view of Ford owners,* the writer of this letter concluded that any letter designed to sell inner tubes would probably not pay unless he could devise a plan which would enable him to send his message at the time when the reader was in need of a new inner tube. He might write with the purpose of causing the reader to remember his product and its attractive price when an inner tube was needed. In other words, when he put himself in the reader's place, the limited results that might reasonably be expected from his letter became apparent. The plan of the letter is clever—from the writer's point of view only, for it merely causes the reader to question the quality of the product, if indeed he really reads intently enough to understand the message.

6. *Purpose of business letters.*—Business letters are written not to entertain, or to please, or to ex-

cite admiration, or to do anything except to gain an effect which will promote the business interests of the writer. The effective business correspondent thinks always in terms of *effects*. If he anticipates accurately the effect of what he says, he will not, for instance, attempt to get a practically impossible result. He will know the conditions which he must guard against or take advantage of. Either he will undertake to modify conditions that cause the recipient's attitude to be unfavorable toward the proposal in his letter, or he will shape his selling plan for meeting these adverse conditions to the best advantage. He knows the vital difference between a letter that is effective and a letter that is merely correct.

7. *How business letters differ.*—Business letters may be divided into four classes:

1. Incorrect and Ineffective
2. Correct and Ineffective
3. Effective and Incorrect
4. Effective and Correct.

Every letter belongs in one of these four divisions. A great many business letters should be included in the second division; letters that are correct in form and expression, but are not so effective in getting results as the writer desires. The fault of these letters lies in what is said rather than in how it is said, as in the case of the letter quoted in Section 4.

Some letters are mechanically incorrect, but still effective. As a rule, however, these letters might

have been more effective had they been correct in form as well as in the more vital matters of salesmanship. Correct dress is nearly always an asset in personal selling, and to the recipient a letter represents the writer as a person. A letter that is unattractive in appearance leads the reader to feel instinctively that the subject shares this quality. Therefore correctness, tho not indispensable, is always desirable. Exceptional cases might be found where incorrect form would be more effective than correct form. It is well to remember that the aim is to produce an effective letter, and that the most important requirement in writing effective letters is selling sense, rather than the ability to write business English that is grammatically and rhetorically correct.

8. *Selling sense can be developed.*—While it is comparatively easy to learn to write correctly, it is not so easy to learn to write effectively. Yet good selling sense, which is the root of effective writing, can be developed. It is now a matter of general agreement that salesmen are both born and made, chiefly made; and especially are they self-made.

No better opportunity exists for self-development in the art of salesmanship than work as a correspondent—if the correspondent will take a keen interest in the *effects* that his letters accomplish in the mind and heart and will of his readers, and will endeavor to think out the reason for the success or failure of his letters.

In many cases the correspondent will find, when his

letter fails, that he did not consider certain conditions in the reader's environment, which, had he borne in mind, would have caused him to anticipate more vividly the effect of what he said.

9. *Knowledge vital to successful writing.*—How to gain ability to write letters that are invariably effective is the problem. This power, as already stated, requires considerable knowledge on the part of the writer. He must know the fundamental policies of good service on which his house is built, know thoroly the products or services which his house sells, know competing concerns, know the development of his own concern, and know also conditions in the addressee's environment which will affect his attitude toward the letter. In short, what the correspondent ought to know includes all the knowledge that a good personal salesman ought to have.

The first step in acquiring the knowledge necessary for effective writing, therefore, is to understand what kinds of information are desirable and to appreciate their relative value.

10. *Specific information.*—The following analysis will serve only to suggest the kinds of information that are desirable. This information is arranged in the order of relative importance.

A. Knowledge of the market for the products or the services of your company:

1. Knowledge of the attitude of the classes of people and of the individuals that compose

your market, toward your product and your house; also toward competing products and houses

2. Knowledge of the causes of this attitude

3. Definite knowledge of what you want the attitude to be toward you, your house and your product or service

4. Broad economic knowledge of your market

a. The territorial extent of the entire possible market for your products or services

b. The relative desirability of parts of the entire market, both territorially and by classes of customers

B. Knowledge of your products or services from the following points of view:

1. Of the immediate buyer
2. Of the ultimate consumer
3. Of your concern
4. Of the manufacturer

C. Knowledge of your house:

1. The policies underlying its development

2. Its organization and the personnel of the organization

3. The true significance of your place in the organization

D. Knowledge of human nature

1. Of yourself
2. Of the more general human traits of character, instincts, likes, dislikes, desires, ambitions, emotions, and so on

E. Knowledge of selling principles.

This analysis is necessarily incomplete, but is adequate for the present purpose.

11. *Human nature and selling principles.*—On first thought, it may seem strange that knowledge of selling principles is placed last, since effective letter-writing is primarily a matter of good salesmanship. But if the correspondent is well supplied with the kinds of information placed above selling principles in this analysis, he will be in a position to formulate his own principles.

In nearly all cases, a sound selling principle is based upon some trait in human nature. Take, for example, the fact that it is wise to make the reader realize that you appreciate his point of view. Confidence is inspired by those who possess sufficiently broad and sympathetic intelligence to enable them to see and appreciate another's position. Therefore, in order to gain the reader's confidence, it is even advisable now and then to admit derogatory facts. We naturally distrust claims of perfection. Thus, selling principles must be based on traits of human nature, and these are the kind of selling principles referred to in the foregoing analysis.

Many would put knowledge of human nature first in this chart; but the sections preceding it constitute information of greater practical value to the correspondent than a general knowledge of human nature, valuable as this is. From one point of view, however, the first three divisions are knowledge of human nature practically applied.

12. *Market and product.*—It will also be observed that there is no clear line of demarcation between sections A and B, knowledge of the market and knowledge of the product. One supplements the other. Knowledge of the product *from the point of view of the market* is most essential.

An important point here is that *complete* technical information concerning a product is not sufficient and might even be undesirable. Knowing *all* about a product is desirable only in so far as the intensity of this knowledge does not lessen knowledge of the product *from the reader's point of view.*

But these two kinds of knowledge are not necessarily antagonistic. It is possible to have the minutest technical knowledge of products and processes of manufacture and because of this knowledge even more thoroly to appreciate the reader's standpoint. Such complete knowledge is often necessary to enable the writer to supply the reader with such facts concerning the product as will cause him to think and act as desired. Yet there is always the possibility that the correspondent may know so much about a product that he fails to appreciate how little the reader knows

about it. Knowledge of the product or service in its relation to the market is the most important kind of information in salesmanship, and, therefore, in business correspondence.

13. *Writer's mental attitude.*—Additional knowledge that might well be included in an analysis of most desirable information is a concrete idea of what constitutes the most favorable mental attitude on the part of the writer. Many written messages fail because the writer's attitude in general, and toward the reader in particular, is awry. Often half the effort involved in writing an effective message is saved by a deliberate change from the wrong to the right mental attitude toward the addressee. At this point the value of an attitude of willingness to learn from experience is to be emphasized; constant interest in the results of all letters written and constant effort to find out the "why" of the results achieved. A feeling that there is no limit to the development of one's skill in writing effective letters is as important as knowledge and practice of the right mental attitude toward individual addressees.

The proper mental attitude is really a matter within the control of the writer. To attain it, he must sometimes go thru a complete change in his moral make-up as well. If he would impress the reader that he is sincere in his statements, he must first be actually sincere in his own convictions. The easiest method of gaining the confidence and good-will of a reader is actually to merit this reward. Yet, a correspondent

cannot well rise above the level of sincerity and integrity as they are practised in the policies of his house by men high up in the organization. It is not always the fault of the correspondent when his letters lack conviction.

14. *Letters that are effective; a summary.*—An effective letter is always written, either consciously or unconsciously, with keen appreciation of the reader's point of view. It may or may not be correct in form or grammar or rhetoric, tho it is usually technically correct. It is always an example of good salesmanship.

Only men whose selling sense is highly developed write invariably effective letters. Such men, as a rule, could tell *why* their letters make good. They know the basic principles of successful correspondence. They constantly add to their fund of the kind of information that enables them better to know the reader's point of view. They have the necessary knowledge and ability to make effective use of what they know.

With reference to knowledge which underlies ability to appreciate the reader's point of view, correspondents might be divided into these classes: (1) those who know less than they should know about their addressees; (2) those who know their addressees fairly well, but do not take advantage of their knowledge; and (3) those who both know the addressees' point of view and take full advantage of their knowledge.

REVIEW

Explain the modern attitude toward business correspondence, and the relation of correspondence to salesmanship.

What is the basic principle of effective letter-writing?

Explain the relation of correctness to effectiveness.

Can selling sense be developed? If so, how?

What knowledge is most valuable to the correspondent?

What part does the word "why" play in writing effective letters?

How does the writer's mental attitude help or hinder effective writing?

Mention the fundamental requirements in writing effective letters.

CHAPTER II

THE READER'S POINT OF VIEW

1. *Getting the reader's point of view in any occupation.*—To appreciate the other man's point of view is fundamental to success in any occupation. The most successful executives are those who best understand the point of view of the employes under them; and the most successful employes are those who are able to appreciate the viewpoint of the men higher up. The lawyer who best understands the point of view of the witness he examines gets the best results.

This sympathy and understanding is especially important in business correspondence. Frequently a correspondent fails to get the results he wants because he has at best only a hazy idea of the impression he wishes to make in his letter; and his idea is hazy in nearly every case because he is not sufficiently well acquainted with the addressee's point of view. On the other hand, if he does see clearly the point of view of the reader, he will have a definite idea of the several impressions he must make on the reader, and that in itself is a decided step toward success. Broad, intelligent and unselfish interest in the other fellow is back of ability to look at a proposition thru another

man's eyes. It explains the success of writers who base their salesmanship upon service. Policies of service which lie behind successful salesmanship can be developed only by men who do their thinking from the point of view of those they serve.

2. *Real cause of ineffective writing.*—The kind of thinking that results in effective letter-writing is always based on accurate and complete knowledge of the facts and conditions in the case, for only such knowledge can enable the writer to appeal effectively to his reader. The average business correspondent is too much inclined to take a chance. He is constantly tempted merely to "guess" at the true condition of affairs that surround the addressee. Often a desire to finish his dictation as quickly as possible—which, for him, is an arduous task because he does not put the right kind of thinking into the work—tends to keep him from gathering information that would make his work more interesting and more effective.

If the correspondent takes pains to add constantly to his stock of information concerning those with whom he deals, his letters will improve from day to day, and he will come to look upon the task of writing effective letters as a real game; and, as in any other game, he will find that there is always a chance to lower the score of failures. But it is necessary to concentrate on each letter. If the writer thinks constantly of the *effects* to be produced, he will gradually acquire keener appreciation of the reader's point of

view; and this appreciation, in turn, will produce still greater concentration.

3. *Reader's point of view in practice.*—About twenty years ago two young men of about equal experience and education began to work for the same company. One of them is now vice-president of the company. The other earns only $40 a week, as a general correspondent. It was just recently that the latter began to write really effective letters. But the man who became vice-president was writing effective letters within a year or two after he began to work for the firm. Why did the one take almost twenty years to become an effective writer, while the other attained success in two years?

The answer to this question involves a comparison of the characters of the two men. The first was willing to learn; the other was satisfied with what he knew. The first man acquired the habit of asking sensible questions, and the information he gained soon enabled him to reach the top. Here is his own statement of the case:

> My company soon gave me the chance to get on the road as a salesman. I accepted the chance eagerly because it would enable me at first to get hold of a lot of outside facts about the business; a knowledge of conditions that would be invaluable to me in view of my ambition to find out the possibilities of developing business by mail.
>
> I had already formed the habit of reflecting on the cause whenever one of my letters was either distinctly effective or decidedly a failure. And as a personal salesman, when I failed to land an order, I often went out and walked the street in an effort to think out the cause before I called on the

next prospective buyer. Sometimes I went back and frankly asked the unyielding buyer about conditions. Almost invariably I found that my failure to sell was due to the lack of knowledge of facts concerning competition or conditions within the buyer's business. And I frequently asked older salesmen in this business and in other lines about conditions as they knew them out of their larger experience. The result of this aggressive willingness to find out things was to give in a short time a big fund of the kind of information that serves so well to cut down the percentage of failures in the selling game.

4. *Knowledge of conditions and of psychology.*— Merely a realization of such facts as the following is of little practical value: that nearly all of us dislike to admit financial inability; that we all like to be addressed by name; that we dislike to have our names misspelled or mispronounced; that we do not wish to be driven; that we do not like faultless people, and so on. To insist upon such generalities is dangerous, if it leads the correspondent to neglect the many exceptions among the addressees to whom he writes.

The real solution of the correspondent's problem lies in his acquiring a knowledge of the economic conditions that surround the individual addressee in his relation to the correspondent's proposition. This knowledge of the conditions that are responsible for the addressee's point of view will enable the correspondent to judge how the average person would react to those conditions and to make allowances for exceptional cases *without much effort.* Then, if he really imagines himself in the addressee's place, he can

take advantage of the latter's fundamental desires, of his likes and dislikes.

5. *Another example.*—Suppose you receive the following letter:

Dear Sir:

You know that a big volume of business lowers the cost of production; and the price you pay for tailor-made clothes is fixed, first of all, by the cost of producing them.

Last year our sales were well over $1,000,000. Our shops rank with the biggest in the country. What does this mean to you? It means better clothes for less money. The small tailoring shops cannot compete with large-scale production.

And the fact that we are tailors to a whole nation of people makes it imperative that we set and maintain a high standard of service; for idle machinery would mean a correspondingly big loss to us. Therefore, you can rest assured that the service you will get from us will be satisfactory in every respect.

In fact, we *guarantee* unqualified satisfaction. Each garment we make is sent out with the following guaranty: "This garment, made by the Fisk Tailors, is guaranteed by them to give you *entire* satisfaction. If you do not feel *entirely* satisfied with *any* garment you get from us, we will take any amount of trouble and expense necessary to make you *entirely* satisfied."

Such an unqualified guaranty assures you of our best effort to give you entirely satisfactory service in the first place; for we know how disagreeable it is when a customer has to complain in order to get satisfactory service.

Painstaking service to men like you has built this business into a large-scale producer; and large-scale production is reflected in our prices.

Our special representative, Mr. Marshall Zombro, in your town will be pleased to show you the latest Fisk models and fabrics.

Yours very truly,

THOMAS WILLIAMSON,
Pres. Fisk Tailors.

How would this letter impress you? Would you read it thru? Would it cause you to feel that probably you ought to see the local representative of this tailoring concern about the suit of clothes you desire to purchase? Definitely what are the results that the writer of this letter wishes to secure? Would the letter secure them, or not? Why, or why not? *From the addressee's point of view,* what was the effect of this letter? The president of this company considered it a sound message of the type that he likes to have go out over his own signature. It reads connectedly and seems to be sound in logic. Apparently the letter is all right; but it failed. Why?

It was mailed from the Fisk Company to two hundred "live prospects" whose names were supplied by Mr. Marshall Zombro. But Mr. Zombro could not trace a single new customer to its influence, and as he had paid the postage on the 200 letters he wrote the president of the company. The latter was so much interested that he came down to Mr. Zombro's town to find out why the letter had failed. Together he and his agent did some effective investigation to find out what kind of message would bring business. They interviewed some of the young men to whom their unsuccessful letter had been sent, but they did not find any one who had read it thru. They did get from these young men, however, a great deal of information which a little later enabled them to write a very successful letter.

6. *Classification of mailing list.*—Among the

fundamental faults of the letter just quoted is the failure to apply the principles that underlie mailing-list classification. Essential differences in the point of view of the various types represented by the two hundred young men were not considered. Many of the men had never yet indulged in the luxury of tailored-to-measure clothes. Others had been patronizing a local tailor with whom they were on friendly terms. Some were served by a house similar to the Fisk Company, and were satisfied. Some were office men; others were salesmen; others were factory men; about half of them were married. Clearly the letter did not take into consideration all these important facts. Rather, it took for granted that all the men would be interested in a distant maker of tailor-made clothes because his concern was a large one.

These two men, the manufacturer and the agent, in planning their second letter, thought it would be best to send out one good letter to a selected list of men who they thought would be really interested, those who really needed to dress well, and especially those who were in the habit of buying tailored-to-order clothes. Together they decided on the type of prospective customer they should try to reach, and the agent agreed to supply a list of names. It was a much shorter list than the first one—about sixty names—but the mailing was successful.

7. *Right combination for effective criticism.*—This was an ideal combination for the criticism of the letter already quoted: the manufacturer, the agent and

indirectly the consumer. The manufacturer knew that his letter had flatly failed and was eager to find out why. He was where he could definitely ascertain the addressee's opinion of the letter, and he soon realized that the appeal was entirely wrong.

The letter stated the manufacturer's reason why the addressee should buy, but did not give the reader's reason. Incidentally it may be noted that the manufacturer based his reason on faulty logic, for if his service had built up a big business, the desirability of the service must have been independent of the present size of his business. But this logical inconsistency was not a great fault. The young men he interviewed did not have logical reasons for patronizing their tailor or their clothing merchant, and had not noticed the inconsistency. The main fault of the letter lay elsewhere. The manufacturer transferred the man who wrote that letter to a job which brought him into contact with local agents and their customers—in order that he might obtain and appreciate the buyer's point of view.

When the manufacturer adopted the reader's point of view, he saw that the first paragraph failed to interest, and lacked any definite appeal to the reader's sense of self-interest. He saw clearly that the second paragraph appeared to be mere bragging, notwithstanding the attempt to connect the subject with the reader's welfare. He saw that the last statement in the same paragraph was not only unnecessary, but that it might arouse sympathy in behalf of

the local tailors. He saw that there is no connection between the size of the manufacturer's business and the necessity of giving satisfactory service, and that the mention of machinery might suggest machine-made clothes. He realized that the guarantee of entire satisfaction is so common nowadays that it has lost much of its original force, and that the "sympathetic" statement, "we know how disagreeable it is when a customer has to complain in order to get satisfactory service," is not only unnecessary but harmful. Finally, the manufacturer also noticed how the words, "in fact," at the beginning of the fourth paragraph might suggest that the writer considered that he was doing something exceptional in offering an unqualified guarantee. Such is the criticism which results when the reader's point of view is taken.

8. *A successful sales letter.*—Suppose a young man living in a small town receives about four weeks before Easter, the following letter:

Dear Sir:

What will well-dressed young men wear four weeks from next Sunday?

Two models will be preferred. Each of these is illustrated and described in the inclosed folder. Made to your measure, either model would be correct for you this spring and summer. These are the kind of conservatively up-to-date models which may be worn every day as well as on dress occasions.

If your order for your Easter suit reaches us before the end of this week, you may have an extra pair of trousers, striped or to match your suit, without extra charge. This offer is made in order to avoid part of the rush of orders

just before Easter, when we follow our six-work-day delivery guaranty as usual.

We know that this announcement will give us an early start on our Easter rush, and we want you to be in on it. Please take this letter to Mr. Marshall Zombro, our agent in your town, and he will be glad to give you FISK SERVICE.

This letter does not sound very impressive, but it influenced twenty-eight out of the selected sixty young men to see Mr. Zombro before it was too late to take advantage of the special offer. Why? From the addressee's point of view, what is there in this appeal which secured the desired results? In the first place, it is interesting. All the young men to whom the letter and the folder were sent were interested in the question of correct dress for Easter. Then, in the folder were two excellent illustrations. Each young man imagined himself in the place of the young men in the illustrations—which were realistic, not exaggerated. The settings were typical, small-town street scenes on a bright Easter morning.

The letter is eloquent in what it suggests rather than in what it says. It does not attempt to persuade the addressee by means of words directly. Its strongest persuasion lies in its timeliness and in its special offer, made without the usual threat, "unless you take advantage of this offer right away, it will be too late and you will lose $10—lose it just the same as if you were to burn up a ten-dollar bill." In other words, it does not run the risk of insulting the young man by branding him as a bargain-hunter. Since there is a sufficient reason for the special offer, no urg-

ing is necessary, and because no pressure is brought to bear the reader is inclined to feel that he really ought to see Mr. Zombro. At least he will keep the letter, for it says, "Take this letter to Mr. Marshall Zombro." He therefore keeps it and thinks about it, and the more he thinks, the more inclined he is to see Mr. Zombro. The success or the failure of any sales letter is proved, in the end, by the results it accomplishes, and this letter influenced nearly 47 per cent of those who received it, to buy. Its excellence cannot be fully appreciated until it is studied from the reader's point of view.

9. *Other types of letters.*—Sales letters were used as illustrations in the foregoing sections. But the principle of taking the reader's point of view applies with equal force to all other kinds of letters. When the bookkeeper in a coal office writes the words "Thank you" somewhere on the receipted bill, and seems to emphasize unduly his gratitude by large script, what might be the effect of an addressee who happens to be somewhat sensitive, especially if the bill was paid somewhat past the date when it was due? It is possible that the reader might receive the impression that the bookkeeper's thankfulness was due to the fact that the payment was a delightful surprise to him. And the "Thank you" at the end of letters of request takes agreement for granted; it is doubtful what the effect will be.

The following collection letter, which is often quoted, is interesting and will bear studying.

Dear Sir:

"Huh! Another dunning letter! Those people needn't be so nervous. They'll get their money—some time."

Did you think that, when you opened this letter?—No, don't toss it aside for consideration "tomorrow"; just stop this time and consider US.

We don't like to write dunning letters any better than you like to get them, but you see you have a little of our money—$16.50. That isn't much, and of course you intend to pay it.

But let's square this up NOW; don't read another letter until you have wrapped your check in this one and mailed it back in the inclosed addressed envelop.

That will just rescue your name from our "unfair" list, and you don't know how much we will appreciate it.

Your very truly,

This letter was successful. It does not *seem to* consider the reader's point of view. But the writer completely and accurately expressed the reader's sentiments, except, possibly, in the last sentence of the third paragraph. There is a slight implication there that the reader intends to pay this bill only because it "isn't much." It probably would have been better to omit the words, "That isn't much."

But this letter compels the reader to feel that the writer is square. "You have a little of our money—$16.50," is original and effective. It shows the reader the writer's point of view, and this is very important in writing difficult letters—for example, letters in which the writer refuses credit and at the same time attempts to get cash with an order. But in order that the writer may influence the reader to appreciate his viewpoint it is necessary that he prove to the

reader, beyond question, that he has really put himself in the reader's place.

10. *Acquiring the reader's point of view.*—Before a writer can acquire the habit [1] of taking the reader's point of view he must realize the importance of putting himself in the other man's place. When a correspondent once sees that he cannot write effective letters, if he lacks the ability to do this, he will naturally take pains to gain that knowledge of the other man which will produce the necessary sympathy and understanding.

Another important means of acquiring the reader's point of view is to cultivate an allowable inquisitiveness in regard to the addressee's circumstances and conditions. Practically every correspondent might easily know more about each addressee, and take greater advantage of what he knows, were he more inquisitive. As a rule, he could know the size, location and character of the addressee's town; its rate of growth; the chief industries; the kind of business in which the addressee is engaged, and the size and financial rating; the addressee's place in the business and so on. Even such general facts as these might help greatly in making a letter effective. The location of a town sometimes indicates a great deal about any man who is in business in that town, and the correspondent should try to judge his man as accurately as possible by whatever information is available. The

[1] A reading of the chapter on "Habit" in William James' "Principles of Psychology" would be of value.

business man in the South differs, in both the personal and the business viewpoint, from the business man in the North; the Westerner is different from the Easterner. The correspondent should be alert to perceive essential differences in his addressees; if he is, he will often be able to tell by the general appearance and the very "feel" of the letter he is answering what kind of person he is writing to.

11. *Reading between the lines.*—The expert correspondent will get back of the man's letter to the man himself. He is not limited to a literal interpretation of the meaning as expressed in the letter, but reads between the lines. This is often necessary if he would accurately put himself into the reader's place; for few writers of the letters he answers say exactly what they mean to say.

For example, a new customer wrote to a wholesale house as follows: "Most of the shipment was in good condition. A little of the glassware was broken." In this case there had been no previous correspondence to help the correspondent determine whether or not this man was one of those who belittle the cause of the complaint. There are many men in business who feel that they ought not to "kick" unless the cause of the complaint is serious. Therefore, in this instance, the correspondent wished to play safe. Here is one paragraph of his reply: "Even if the damage is trivial, we want to make it right. Perhaps a few of the tumblers were chipped, or some crockery. You will do us a favor by telling us exactly what the

damage was." Thus the correspondent did not really encourage complaint, but he did ask for details and emphasized the fact that his company wished to give customers complete satisfaction.

The following letter, written in response to a letter from a manufacturer asking a merchant why he had not sent in any order lately, is also the kind that will not stand the test of analysis.

Dear Sir:

For the last few years the coal business has been in a precarious condition, of which you are probably aware, and we have been placing our business closer at home in order that we might help stimulate the soft-coal business a little more. Possibly some time in the future we will be able to renew our business acquaintance when conditions will permit.

Yours very truly,

The correspondent knew that the writer's account had been cut off abruptly; therefore, he realized that this letter was merely an excuse. He found that the last order from this merchant was for goods concerning which many complaints had been received. Winning back this account was, then, a comparatively easy matter.

This ability to analyze, to read between the lines, is an important means of gaining the knowledge of *individual* cases which is necessary if the correspondent is to realize and appreciate the conditions that occasion the point of view of the man to whom he writes.

REVIEW

How do you explain the varying degrees of ability possessed by different persons, as regards the writing of effective letters?

Explain the connection between knowing the reader's point of view and knowing the conditions which occasion that point of view.

Can you find the basic reason for the success or failure of your letters?

Why should you classify a mailing list?

How can you acquire the habit of being sensitive to the reader's point of view?

CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LETTERS

1. *Application of fundamental principles.*—The distinction between effective and ineffective letters has been stated and the fundamental point of view of the effective correspondent has been insisted upon. It is not enough, however, to advise a man to be effective, or to show him the standpoint from which his efforts must be judged. It is equally important to show wherein effectiveness consists. Some of the characteristics of effective letters are so important that they should engage the attention of the reader. It may, perhaps, seem that some of the principles stated are merely the enunciation of homely truths of universal acceptance. Truths may find universal acceptance without general application. When well-known truths fall into disuse it is imperative that attention be forcibly directed to them. It is always the conscious application of fundamental principles to particular cases which makes for excellence, and it is the conscious use of such principles which raises the writing of letters in business from a waste in efficiency to an effective instrument in business affairs.

2. *Interesting the reader.*—Interest is indispensable. Unless the letter interests the reader he will

not read it thru and its message is lost. But if the letter is only mildly interesting the reader will not give it his undivided attention as he reads. To make the letter interesting is a difficult requirement. It cannot be done unless we *know* what is interesting and what is not interesting to readers.

In case an inquiry comes in for a price on a certain product, tell him the price before you dwell on quality or service, especially if the product is standardized in quality. If his chief interest is satisfied first, he may read with interest what is said about service or quality. Furthermore, if the price is withheld until the end of the letter, the reader is likely to interpret what goes before as an apology for a high price.

These effects do not necessarily follow. It is impossible to lay down hard-and-fast rules. In general, when the price is set forth boldly and without additional information apparently designed to impress the fact that it is a proper price, we are likely to feel that the writer believes his price to be low, and we will probably take him at his word—unless, of course, we are asking for a price on goods highly standardized in quality—a market value which is well known to us.

3. *Selecting the chief interest.*—It is always advisable to satisfy the reader's chief interest as soon as possible, and in many cases the important thing is to determine just what this interest is. A practical illustration of this point is found in a letter which informed the addressee that he must keep a set of books

and pay for them because they were not returned until after the date on which he had agreed to send them back in case he should not wish to keep them. The concern allowed prospective purchasers a five-day period for inspection. Many purchasers returned the books after this period had expired. In preparing a letter to meet this situation, the question came up as to whether it would be better to tell the addressee frankly in the very first paragraph that he would not be allowed to violate his contract, and then try to resell the books to him; or to try to resell the books, and then later in the letter inform him that he must abide by his contract.

It was agreed that he ought first to be persuaded to keep the books, and this plan was adopted. But the letter was not successful. The policy was too much like apologizing to someone for bumping into him just before the bump is deliberately given. It was found that the other order of statements, used in a later letter, was much more effective; that is, to tell the reader first that he would not be allowed to break his contract; and secondly, that he really ought not to do it, out of consideration for his own best interests.

Why was this better? In the first place, the reader's interest was held from the start. He skimmed over the first letter trying to find an answer to his question, "Will they or won't they take back the books?" From the tone in the opening part of the letter he was led to feel that the dealer might take back the books, that he had them on the de-

fensive. Then he was told that they would not let him break his contract—after he expected them to agree to do it, if necessary. When the addressee was immediately told that he would not be allowed to violate his contract, he was obliged to take the defensive. This is in accordance with an important general principle of salesmanship: "Keep the buyer on the defensive," or "Dominate the interview," as it is sometimes stated.

The arrangement of impressions is an important factor in making our letters interesting to the reader. What arrangement gains interest? The letter which answers the questions most likely to arise, as they arise, will be the most interesting. This again requires the writer to take the reader's point of view.

Very often the beginning of the letter largely determines the degree of interest the reader takes in the entire letter. If something of interest to the reader is said in the very first words, he receives the impression that the letter gets right down to business, and he will be more likely to read the rest of it. A large percentage of unsuccessful letters fail because they do not interest the reader at the start.

4. *Repetition dulls effect.*—The mail sales manager in a certain publishing concern discovered, much to his surprise, as a result of a trip thru the West, that less than 10 per cent of the letters sent out by his concern were read, and that more than 50 per cent of them were not even opened. His customers are chiefly business men. Many told him that without

opening them they could "spot" a letter from his house every time, even tho it was in a plain envelop; and that they seldom opened the letters because they knew *from experience* that the contents would be of no interest to them.

One man said to this mail-salesman, "You people seem to get out letters on the slightest provocation." This statement expresses the fundamental reason for the failure of many sales letters; that is, that are sent out too frequently and without sufficient reason.

5. *Timeliness gains interest.*—The advertising manager of a manufacturing company in Pittsburgh, which averages about $20,000,000 a year in sales, gave the following explanation of his success in using sales letters:

Persistency and frequency in sending out sales letters are desirable, but are not, in themselves, reasons for sending a letter. To send out a letter to the trade just because it is about time when another letter ought to go out is suicide, unless you happen to have a real message. We do not circularize a list of names unless we have a message of considerable news value. Seventy-five per cent of the value of a letter is in the timeliness of its subject matter. For example, take this "Copper-Clad" letter which went to electric light and power companies, telephone companies, and so on, at a time when copper was high in price:

Gentlemen:

The high price of copper has no doubt caused you to consider seriously how to economize in wire purchases.

There are doubtless many places in your electrical transmission system where larger sizes of hard-drawn copper wire are being used than the electrical require-

ments demand, in order to provide sufficient strength to withstand mechanical stresses. The first cost of such wires is needlessly high, without reducing in a corresponding degree the maintenance cost.

If you could purchase a wire for such places that would combine the high tensile strength of steel with the rust-resisting qualities of copper, and with sufficiently high conductivity to answer the electrical requirements, it would mean a great saving to you.

Standard Colonial Copper-Clad Wire is the solution of this problem. It will be to your advantage to learn more about its characteristics—its high conductivity, great tensile strength, low first cost as compared with copper, and low maintenance cost as compared with iron or steel, etc.

The inclosed card, properly checked and mailed, will bring our new C. C. C. Bulletin with complete information about this wire; also other bulletins which you may desire for your files.

Yours very truly,

Now that letter pulled about ten per cent replies. Why? Not because it is a wonderful letter, but because its subject matter was timely. The first paragraph touched the vital spot in the buyer—his pocket book—and echoed what was in his mind, namely, the high price he had to pay for copper wire.

Such a message is seldom created by the writer of the letter. Its source rests deep down in the organization he represents. But it is his job to see an opportunity for a worth-while message—and to avoid sending out letters that are not timely. This letter, for instance, would not have been read, and might have failed, had not nearly all the letters previously sent out to this list of names been messages of live news value. The general reputation of a concern for writing letters that really have something worth while to say has a great deal to do with the difficulty the writer has in getting his addressee to read his letters.

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6. *What is said: the big factor.*—It is what we say in a letter rather than how we say it that is responsible for the letter's interest or lack of interest. It is practically impossible to interest a reader thru attractive expression alone. On the other hand, it is true that the reader's interest in certain facts which ought to be naturally interesting under the existing conditions might be killed by means of poor expression. But of these two factors—content, or *what* is said, and style, or *how* it is said—the first is the more important. It is relatively easy to give adequate expression to facts when, in themselves, they are of live interest to the reader; but the task of forcing interest by means of clever expression is as difficult as it is dangerous.

7. *Beginning of the letter.*—Correspondents are not all so considerate of the reader as the one who began his letter like this:

> This letter is of interest only to the man who is having carburetor trouble. I don't want to take up your time for nothing. But if you do have trouble of this kind, listen.

The letter was sent to a long list of automobile owners. It was read with interest by those whom it was meant to reach, and for any others there could be no disappointment. It was successful because the elements of fairness, honesty and consideration, from the reader's point of view, as displayed in this first paragraph, characterized the entire letter. This paragraph, because it caught the interest of the man it was meant for, and at the same time won his respect, con-

fidence and sympathy, is largely responsible for the success of this letter. It aroused sufficient interest to cause the reader to want to read on intently. This is known to be the case, because the same letter had failed when the first paragraph read as follows:

> Carburetor trouble—that nightmare of joy-riding! However, the dawn of the day of that pleasant dream is here—that dream of troubleless days with carburetors.

This beginning was clever but that was all. Mere cleverness in itself seldom arouses much interest; it is so seldom spontaneous and natural.

8. *Close logical connection sustains interest.*—Unless what is said in the opening paragraph to arouse the reader's interest and cause him to want to read on, is logically related to what follows, the letter will probably not be read with interest. A letter often fails when the writer "manufactures" his opening paragraph. The following is a good illustration of a wrong beginning:

Dear Sirs:

> Preparedness is the slogan of the twentieth century. We are in favor of preparation for war—for war on exorbitant prices.

Altho the writer of the letter from which this is taken makes it a rule to make his first statement one with which the reader will agree, he sometimes fails to establish a logical connection between his first statement and what follows. In many cases it would be better to reverse this man's rule and say something

in the first paragraph with which the reader would not agree.

The following letter, which was sent to retail jewelers by a wholesale jewelry concern, shows one way in which the interest of the reader may be aroused at once.

Dear Sir:

We do not agree with the following statement made by the President of the Retail Jewelers' Association in his unusual address:

"Stick to the manufacturers who give jewelers the exclusive sale of first-class merchandise. If you do this it will encourage others, and in a short time you will have the much coveted exclusive merchandise that cannot be sold by department stores and catalog houses."

We have been selling first-class merchandise to jewelers exclusively ever since we have been in business. But that is not a sound business reason why you should stick to us —not as sound as this:

At this point the business reasons why jewelers should give this company their business are enumerated. The letter arouses interest at the beginning by slightly antagonizing the reader; and "its point of contact" is closely connected with the rest of the letter.

9. *Credibility, the mark of a good letter.*—Credibility is close to interest in importance. But, of course, the relative importance of a characteristic depends on the individual case. Under certain circumstances, gaining the reader's confidence might be more important and more difficult than gaining his interest. For example, a selling letter written in response to

an inquiry concerning a certain class of bonds would seek chiefly to gain the reader's confidence in what is said, as interest in such a case may be assumed.

Credibility is a necessary quality in every letter. If the reader feels that what he reads is probably not true, if he is inclined at all to doubt what is said, he will be inclined to resist the writer's effort to interest him as well as to influence his action, for credibility is a factor in gaining interest.

10. *How to gain the reader's confidence.*—One executive who believes in making a cooperative study of the letter-writing of his concern by means of weekly conferences with all his correspondents, says that there are two simple and fundamental rules to be observed in writing letters that will command confidence: (1) Tell the truth. (2) Prove, or omit, all statements that might not be believed. The gist of his opinion is given here:

> It is not easy for most of us to tell the truth; but to tell the unvarnished truth is the easiest way to get belief in our statements. At least, that is the experience of my force of sales correspondents. But, of course, telling the truth is not enough. To the reader the plain truth would often be "stranger than fiction." Convincing expression of the truth is as important as the truthfulness of the facts expressed. On the other hand, many a plain fact is often killed because the writer tries too hard to prove it. His great effort to convince causes the reader to feel that the effort is necessary.

Whenever a writer in this organization makes a false statement, usually it is found that he *thought* that he was telling the truth. In some cases, however,

he knew he was not telling the truth. The management considers either offense a serious matter. It has discovered that one of the most frequent causes of failure among new men is inability to tell what is strictly the truth. This trait is soon discovered and the man is immediately dismissed. The executive does not feel that it would pay to transfer such a man to other work, or to try to help him acquire the habit of truthfulness. He tried both in several cases, and failed each time. He is convinced that the home is the place, and that youth is the time, for this kind of training.

11. *Perplexing ethical problem.*—The question involves a perplexing ethical consideration. Many feel that good salesmanship requires a certain amount of exaggeration. But this seems to be true only in so far as exaggeration of facts is necessary in order to give the prospective buyer an *impression* of the *true* value that the facts possess for him. Apart from the necessity of doing this, exaggeration or misstatement of any kind is not good salesmanship; because "good salesmanship" always means permanent satisfaction for both buyer and seller.

12. *Example of a letter that commands belief.*—The following letter is a good example of the kind that wins the reader's confidence and commands belief.

Dear Sir:

Your inquiry is in our hands. Thank you. The circular and the booklet you asked for are inclosed. They describe a variety of sound 6 per cent serial bonds, secured by the

best class of newly improved, income-earning, well-located real estate in Chicago and other prosperous cities.

You doubtless are considering a problem like this:

> I have money to invest. Where is a safe, sound, secure investment that will be convenient in every way—pay me a good rate of interest, around 6 per cent, regularly and punctually — and free me from worry, care and supervision?

If this is a fair statement of the investment problem you are now working out, it will be worth your while to check up carefully and see how completely the bonds we offer meet each and every one of your requirements.

The rest of this letter talks *with* the reader about the way in which the bonds offered by this house meet all the requirements and the arguments are convincing. The letter is one of a series that succeeded in the very difficult task of selling bonds by mail.

The following comments on this letter were made by a man who writes effective letters almost invariably, and who knows why his letters are effective.

"Your inquiry is in *our hands*"—in our hands, mind you; an expression which suggests safety and caution and carefulness on the part of this concern. I would prefer to buy bonds from that kind of concern. Just compare "in our hands" with "your inquiry is received," which would be a colorless statement, entirely unnecessary because the reader would know his inquiry must have been received. "In our hands," therefore, is a case of convincing expression of an obvious fact, and not less convincing because the fact is obvious. It is a *natural*, and therefore a *sincere*, and therefore a convincing expression. Combine the naturalness of stating the obvious fact at the beginning of the letter with the subtle suggestion of "in our hands," and you have a good beginning, from the standpoint of getting confidence.

13. *The "you" attitude and the use of the word, "you."*—Several men who were asked to criticise this letter thought it would have been better to begin with, "You are considering a problem like this: 'I have money to invest,' " etc. Perhaps they were expressing their idea of the "you" attitude. But one should not be misled to think that the the use of the word, *you,* is necessarily evidence that the writer has adopted the "you" attitude. "I" may be more effective than "you." The correspondent should be especially careful not to begin with *you* a sentence which tells the reader something he knows as well as the writer, or perhaps better. A letter which began, "You can't defy nature's laws of health and expect to live long and work efficiently," was not successful, chiefly because it overused the word *you.* The reader resented the slight implication that he might not know that obedience to nature's laws is necessary if he would have good health.

The writer's failure to discern properly what is the "you" attitude often explains why his letters do not produce the desired results. But what has been said must not be taken to mean that it is not advisable to make frequent use of this valuable word. It simply means that the "you" attitude involves much more than merely the use of that pronoun.

14. *Letters that lack credibility.*—"In looking thru our files we find your name among those who . . ." Such a beginning manifestly does not tell the truth; or at least it does not seem to do so, espe-

cially to readers who are at all sophisticated. Another example of a poor introduction is that of the collection letter which begins, "In running thru our accounts today we find that you have overlooked our statement of August first." This, from the reader's point of view, is amusing. The use of the expression, "In running thru our accounts," is a weak attempt to appear to be unconcerned about a matter which it would be natural for any good business man to be concerned about.

Is the letter credible? That question ought to be kept constantly in mind. When a correspondent really watches for statements that are not entirely true, he is generally surprised to find how many there are. Very often they are of the general kind. Some one has well said: "All general statements are true only in part—including this one." The presence of general statements is very often the cause—altho the writer does not always realize it—of the lack of credibility in a letter.

15. *A glaring example.*—Few cases of the lack of credibility are as easily apparent as in letters like that which is given below. This letter was sent in response to a letter of inquiry that was businesslike neither in appearance nor in composition:

Dear Sir:

By the clear-cut and businesslike character of your letter of inquiry we feel certain that you would be most successful in the sale of our patented, etc. . . .

There may be people who might feel flattered upon reading a letter like this. But would they be the kind of people that could sell even something of proved merit? Whatever the article was, it could not have been attractive to successful agents if a form letter of this type were necessary to get results. It is a strange truth, however, that the poorest salesmen try to sell the things that are hardest to sell; and often it is the poorest writers who attempt to make their letters perform miracles.

The recent tendency toward greater accuracy in letter-writing is perhaps part of the general movement toward stricter veracity in advertising, for advertising copy and letters are parts of the same field —written salesmanship. There is, in fact, little difference between the fundamental characteristics of advertising copy and those of sales letters.

16. *Lack of credibility an easy mistake to make.*— Lack of veracity or of sincerity in a letter is clearly evident to readers; usually this lack is more quickly discerned by the reader than by the writer. The following letter is an example:

Dear Sir:

Donating the low-priced watch business to outsiders—are Boonville merchants doing this?

Outsiders want this business. What does it amount to?

This: Two years ago Mr. R. H. Jackson, of Belleville in your state, put a display card of —— watches in his window. People were quick to notice it. The inclosed letter from Mr. Jackson gives the record of his sales and profits for the two years.

An exceptional case? No. Our records show hundreds of cases as good or better. And the surprising part of the experience is that sales of higher priced watches increase at the same time. These higher priced watches are often sold to purchasers of our watches. The quality of our watch gains the buyer's confidence.

Like buyers of automobiles, the young men who start out with low-priced watches soon come to desire a better watch. If the low-priced watch he bought was satisfactory, he has a good opinion of the jeweler who sold it to him.

We guarantee the quality. Volume of business accounts for the prices quoted in the catalog inclosed.

The $12.50 assortment is your opportunity to quit donating the low-priced watch business to mail-order houses and department stores.

Yours very truly,

When the second paragraph of this letter states that the mere displaying of the watches on a card in the window developed a good business, it makes an unreasonable assertion. Jewelers know from experience that it takes more than mere display of an advertising card to do this. The next paragraph tends to make the reader think that Mr. Jackson's case was exceptional, despite the denial, for no definite proof is offered that it is not. Other parts of this letter lack credibility to the reader. It is an easy mistake to make.

17. *Definiteness.*—Another characteristic of effective letters is definiteness. It is often a means of gaining credibility and it is closely related to clearness. This quality is equally important in all kinds of letters. Often a lack of definiteness arises from the omission of necessary facts. Writers are inclined

to feel that readers know more than they do concerning the facts in the case, or that they have available the information that is omitted.

But even if certain information omitted is readily available, it is always advisable, as a matter of courtesy, for the writer to present his message to the reader in such a form that the latter can easily and quickly appreciate it. For example, two subscribers to a weekly magazine sent in notice of change of address for the summer. One failed to give his former address, altho he was an advertising man and should have remembered that probably the publisher's mailing list was classified by states and towns and not by names. He missed one copy of the magazine and wasted the time and expense necessary to write another postal card—and, worse, he wasted another's time. The other man, also an advertising man, not only gave all necessary facts, but also stated when he wanted the magazine again sent to his permanent address; and he jotted down a memorandum in his diary one week before that date.

It is significant in this case that the man who was definite gets more than three times the salary that the other man gets. The habit of being definite is valuable. If the cost of all the little cases of indefiniteness in any business were accurately calculated, the result would command serious consideration.

18. *Courtesy.*—One prominent executive has said that "tact is nine out of ten parts made up of true courtesy." He rightly believes the truest tact to be

the spirit of genuine courtesy; a truly sympathetic interest in safeguarding the feelings of others. What some fancy to be tact but which is not thus inspired, is likely to fall flat. Conscious attempts to flatter usually fail. Few salesmen and fewer letter-writers really succeed thru flattery. Sometimes they will tell a customer honestly that they respect his judgment, or something of that kind, but that is not flattery. Even in such a case most people are inclined to suspect flattery. On the whole, the purpose of written salesmanship is better served if statements that flatter or seem to flatter are omitted.

Yet numerous sales letters begin with a touch of flattery; for example, the letter from a paper house to printers, which begins, "You know quality about as well as we do, so we will talk price." Omit the word "about" from this statement and it might not be quite as effective, for it would not be so obviously a true statement. The reader would be less inclined to think that the writer really believes what he says.

19. *"Down to business."*—Correspondents are coming more and more to realize that a business letter must get "down to business" right at the beginning. This means that the writer must state facts clearly and concisely. The day of the "ginger" letter has passed; that is, the letter that employs high sounding phrases designed to arouse the reader's emotions to a high pitch of excitement.

But the necessity of being businesslike does not require that the style of expression be excessively for-

mal. The conversational type of letter—the letter that sounds natural and sincere—is, in fact, the most businesslike kind of letter. On the other hand, the old idea that there must be dynamite in every word of a successful sales letter and that it must begin with a bang and a crash, or a screeching admonition that you ought to stop throwing money away, and then continue with a reel of exclamation points and dashes —a theory which had a prominent place when the art of writing sales letters was in swaddling clothes—has given way to appeals which have a more definite business basis. Consumers and business men are antagonized by the letter that yells and sputters at them; as a matter of fact they seldom read it.

REVIEW

Why is interest an essential characteristic? How can you find out whether or not your letters will be read with interest?

Why is what you say more important than how you say it, with respect to the reader's interest?

What are the fundamental means of gaining belief in what we say?

Does good salesmanship require exaggeration? Explain.

What is the connection between credibility and naturalness?

Explain the difference between the "you" attitude and use of the word *"you."*

Explain the connection between truth in advertising and truth in letter-writing.

Why is it easy to make the mistake of writing letters that are not credible?

CHAPTER IV

EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION

1. *The thought and its presentation.*—It is more desirable, if a choice should be necessary, that a letter contain thoughts which are of value but which are expressed poorly, than that it contain mediocre thought well expressed. No excellence of expression can atone for a lack of effective thinking.

Yet presentation is important; sometimes it is the deciding factor. In the case of two personal salesmen selling the same goods, when neither salesman has any marked advantage in price, quality or service to offer the prospective buyer, personality is often the deciding factor in winning the sale; so, in the case of the correspondent who has no special advantage to offer the customer, a good presentation may influence the prospective buyer to decide in his favor. In the case of refusals of all kinds, and especially in certain adjustment correspondence, the expression of the thought sometimes makes a big difference in results.

2. *What is effective presentation?*—Effective presentation is the art of transplanting thoughts or ideas so that the expression as such supplements, or at least does not interfere with, the effectiveness of the thought in the reader's mind. The ideal goal of the letter-

writer is to gain the utmost effectiveness in both thought and presentation.

Many letters are successful in spite of adverse conditions, because their presentation adequately supplements their thought contents; and many more letters are successful in spite of inadequate presentation, because either the thought in the letter or the circumstances of the recipient, or both, are favorable. Whenever conditions in the case are such as to make effective contents impossible, then the tide might be turned by means of effective presentation. Such cases are exceptional, however, because the success of any letter is primarily dependent upon *what* is said. It is well to keep this steadfastly in mind: effective business writing is a matter of effective business thinking; and this is coming more and more to be recognized in practice.

3. *Business and literary English.*—The foregoing sections may lean to the abstract, but no writer should forget that language is a vehicle of thought, a means of transplanting ideas from one mind to another, and is not in itself an influence to action. The study of grammar and rhetoric as presented in good textbooks is to be recommended, for there is no essential difference between business and literary English. The writer of literature wants to transplant ideas and impressions of a more subtle and emotional nature than does the business correspondent; and this requires greater skill in expression; hence, practice in writing on what are called literary subjects should develop

the business correspondent's skill in expressing his thoughts accurately and completely.

To some business men, especially to those who have learned by experience alone how to write an effective letter, this may sound far fetched. There is some ground for believing that literary and business English are distant rather than close relatives. Literary men rarely write good business letters, and certainly business correspondents could not be relied upon to produce literature. This is due to no essential difference of skill in expression, but rather to different habits of thinking.

4. *Characteristics of business and of literary English.*—In both business and literary English, the writer strives for clearness and correctness; for simplicity and directness—for that kind of expression which requires of the reader as little time and effort as possible. In both cases the writer attempts to adapt himself to the reader. But the business writer is more subservient than the literary man. He is more willing for the sake of profitable results to hold his own personality as revealed in his letter in check for the sake of greater effectiveness. The business man is more sparing in his use of words, and is somewhat less inclined to adhere to technical correctness when such adherence would interfere with effectiveness.

5. *Clearness.*—Perhaps the most important characteristic of effective presentation is clearness. Clear writing is usually the result of clear thinking; but it does not therefore follow that the expression will be

clear because the thought is clear. The ability to express oneself clearly preeminently requires the ability to take the reader's point of view in regard to what is written. Often a statement that is perfectly clear to the writer is not at all clear to the one to whom it is addressed, because the writer has failed to take the proper point of view—the reader's. On the other hand, inaccuracies in expression may convey the meaning which the writer desires the reader to understand. But inaccuracies involve risk.

Vagueness, ambiguity, faulty reference, and all the other violations of clearness result from failure to anticipate the thought the statements made will stir up in the reader's mind.

There are, of course, many other desirable rhetorical qualities in language; but this one—clearness—is of first importance in business correspondence. "Have I made my meaning clear to the reader?"—that is the first question for a correspondent to ask after he has written a letter. To be sure, what is said may be clear, yet not effective. Clearness alone is not enough, by far. That is often the fault with school compositions.

6. *How to gain clearness.*—A clear impression in the writer's own mind of the facts to be presented is the first means of clear expression; the second is the knowledge of how the reader will be likely to interpret the language used; and the third, knowledge of grammar and rhetoric as one means of more accurately anticipating this interpretation.

There are other things to be considered, such as arrangement which causes the reader to progress from ideas that are easily grasped by him to those which would not be so clear were it not for the preceding information. Sometimes this progress is from simple to complex ideas; again it may be from the complex to the simple; or it may be from concrete to general, or vice versa—according to the subject matter, and especially, according to the reader's knowledge of, and attitude toward, the facts presented. Few rules of arrangement, as it affects clearness, can be laid down. An orderly arrangement is an important means of gaining clearness. But the clearest arrangement for one may not be the best for another.

7. *Simplicity and directness.*—Another important characteristic of effective presentation is the use of sentence structure which is as simple as possible, while expressing the thought adequately. Sometimes the desire for extreme simplicity leads a correspondent to say less than he meant to say. This fault is rare, however, for most business messages deal with plain facts. Lack of simplicity may be due to a tendency to use long words. For example, here is the beginning of a letter written by the president of a publishing concern:

Dear Sir:

Knowing that you are desirous of finding out about exceptional profit opportunities, I have requested our sales manager to send you a copy of our much-talked-about publication, "Better Business."

That beginning sounds somewhat cumbersome and is not as simple and direct—and therefore not as effective—as this:

Dear Sir:

"Better Business" is what we call a new book which tells how five men in your line of business made money as the result of a new buying system.

This introduction reads more easily because it is more clear-cut and direct. It combines simplicity and directness. The words used are comparatively short. Such expression is in accord with the modern tendency of business letters to get down to facts. A good business man will expect simplicity and directness in business letters.

8. *Concreteness.*—Concrete expression is a characteristic of successful letters. Concreteness of thought and expression helps make the letter interesting. It also makes the letter clear and easy to read. It is what is usually meant by "getting down to brass tacks." It aims at the particular and specific rather than the general and abstract. An actual case is cited and enough details are given to impress the reader with the reality of what is said. If concreteness is to be gained by using quotations, the quoted matter should be direct rather than indirect. Here is a letter which lacks concreteness:

Dear Sir:

It is probably bad form to talk about our own merits. But we would rather do it directly and whole-heartedly, if we do it at all. Therefore, this message.

Now, all agree, and their agreement is based on common experience, that the House of Hammer has bargain-giving ability of great power. This is due not to great size so much as to knowledge of markets—a cause of size. This knowledge comes from long experience. It's age, not size, that makes this house reliable.

Conservatism does not help the world very much. Long experience may be without good results—if conservatism holds sway. Striking out along new lines is the way to learn fast. That is why we have set a fast pace down thru the years; and our varied experience has added much from year to year to our knowledge of markets. This special knowledge is at your service. What it means to you is most eloquently set forth in the inclosed list of bargains. Such bargains are possible only when buying power is great.

This is the introduction of a two-page letter which runs along to the end in that labored kind of style. It is not to be denied that it is solid, logical, and well expressed, and has features that are to be commended. But the letter is too general and is, therefore, hard to read. Compare it in effect with this:

Dear Sir:

Each one of the eleven offerings listed on the sheets inclosed is a BARGAIN—good enough to warrant the use of capital letters. Take those berry bowls, for instance. They sell regularly at 50 cents each. You could sell them at "Your choice, 25 cents," or even at 19 cents, and still make 11 cents or 5 cents gross profits on each sale.

Mr. Horace Johnson, of Shelbyville, your state, used two gross of these berry bowls to sell as a leader. He filled his window with them, not full, but enough to give the "wide-choice" impression, and yet few enough to show up their white, cut-glass quality. His background was black cheesecloth. It was a rich-looking window. In the center a neat sign read:

These perfect berry bowls sell regularly at 50 cents each. A fortunate purchase enables us to offer them at 19 cents each—one to a customer.

The "19 cents" was displayed boldly. Mr. Johnson also used one 10-inch ad in his local paper. A copy of this is inclosed. Within less than a week he sold 288 of these bowls at a gross profit of $14.40. They would sell almost as fast, maybe faster, at 29 or 39 cents. But Mr. Johnson wanted them to be sure to be big silent advertisements to each woman who bought one.

Or take those aluminum coffee pots. The price we put on them is a silent testimonial to our buying power. This power is not due to our great size so much as to *knowledge* of markets. That knowledge comes from 38 years' concentration on the problem of getting the goods so that we can offer the merchants we serve such values as these coffee pots.

Yes, we make a fair profit on each one of these eleven items. You can buy as many as you want. And please remember that it's age and experience, not merely size, that makes this house what it is—the small-town merchant's servant—one price whether you buy a dozen or a gross—and that a price you can depend upon.

Your order for what you want of the special offerings inclosed will be filled and shipped the day it is received. You have our complete catalog. The prices on other seasonable merchandise quoted in it will tell you that these special offerings are not so special after all.

Yours very truly,

From the point of view of a merchant in a small town whose account with this house has been classified as "lazy" or "dormant," which of the two foregoing letters would best serve to make him feel that probably he had been losing out by not giving this house more of his business; which would be more likely to secure an order? The second letter just quoted is a

good example of what is meant by concreteness. Each hundred letters brought 21 orders. The first letter, written and sent to one hundred merchants, merely as a test of the type of letter that talks generalities, brought only two inquiries and one order.

9. *Analyzing the successful letter.*—Other important principles are illustrated in this letter. It anticipates resistances; for example, knowing that the reader might object to the capitalization of the word, bargain, on the ground that it is trite, the writer forestalls the objection with the expression, "good enough to warrant the use of capital letters." Moreover, the letter seems to have just the proper degree of originality. Then, too, the ideas are naturally expressed. "Take those berry bowls," for instance, sounds more natural and human than it would to begin "those berry bowls,"—or, worse still, something like this: "The berry bowls described on the second sheet, for instance, sell regularly," etc. This letter is much more natural in expression than the other.

An important resistance which is well meant in this successful letter is the feeling the reader would undoubtedly have, that these specials represent a sacrifice for an ulterior purpose. "Yes, we make a fair profit on each one of these eleven items. You can buy as many as you want." This frank, direct statement that the concern naturally expects to make a profit, serves to create a favorable impression. Successful letters anticipate resistances *that are sure to arise.*

But this letter was successful principally because of the use of the concrete. And this concreteness, besides impressing the reader with the truth of the general statement made in the last part of the next to the last paragraph, also makes this general statement an effective explanation of how a profit can be made even tho the selling price is very low. In other words, it is made clear that the age and experience of the concern enables it to offer advantages in low prices. Thus it is not so much the price, but the reason for the price which sells the goods.

Perhaps in this letter the best example of taking the reader's viewpoint is in emphasizing the inexpensiveness of window-space as a means of advertising as compared with space in a local newspaper. "To the average merchant, window-space does not represent an expense," is the way in which a wholesaler explained it. His statement was general and hard to understand because it admits of several interpretations. But he explained it concretely as follows:

> If a man is inclined to be economical and he pays 10 cents cash for each cigar he smokes, he will be likely to smoke fewer cigars than would be the case were he to purchase a box of 50 cigars for $5, even tho the cigar store were as convenient as are the cigars from this box. Why? Principally because there is a difference in the directness of his feeling of expense. Nearly always direct expense and expenses that show an indirect return are resisted in proportion to the degree of directness.

10. *Personality.*—The word, personality, implies several important characteristics of effective presenta-

tion. But personality is a misunderstood word in salesmanship. "Well, I suppose it's my personality" is often the traveling salesman's explanation of his success. In written salesmanship, also, the correspondent very often, when asked to explain why his letters make their appeal, can only say, "they have a personal tone; therefore they get under the skin of the reader." He does not really know what constitutes personality, nor does he understand why his letters have the personal tone. He has not *thought* about personality. What is it? How can one acquire it? He could not definitely answer such questions.

The deepest principles of salesmanship are in this word, "personality," but a general analysis of letters that have an effective personal tone must be made if the full significance of the term is to be understood. Of course the kind and degree of personal tone in letters vary with each house and with each letter, for adaptation of the expression to the reader is primarily a matter of the proper tone. A more or less complete analysis of "tone" might run as follows:

The right tone involves the proper degree of courtesy, dignity, confidence, good nature, frankness, respect, sympathy, optimism, familiarity, cleverness, individuality and originality.

The practical value of such an analysis is that it helps the writer tell definitely why his letter sounds right or does not sound right to him when he puts himself in the reader's place.

11. *Individuality and originality.*—Individuality

and originality are marked characteristics of modern letters that get desired results. Individuality of expression causes the reader to feel that the writer of the letter is a definite and distinct individual—a human being like himself. In general, there should be enough originality so that the reader will not receive the impression that the letter has been dictated mechanically. On the other hand, the letter should not be original to the extent of being odd and eccentric, for in such a case the reader's attention is distracted from the thought and centered on the form. A conscious striving after originality and cleverness is in poor taste and is liable to produce unsatisfactory results. The reader resents it. Yet it is a common fault today.

The following letter lacks the proper kind and degree of originality and individuality. It was not successful.

Gentlemen:

Your favor of the 10th inst. at hand, and in reply we beg to state that your offer to take 3,000 lbs. of sheet-brass at the old rate is not agreeable. As stated in our previous letter, that rate is out of the question owing to causes beyond our control. Consequently our increase of one-half cent a pound must stand, as per the new price-lists. We are very sorry to make this raise in price, but owing to the increased rate to us from the mills, we cannot now see our way clear to accept the offer of business on your terms. We hope, however, that you may see your way clear to accept the new rate, and assuring you again of our regret in the matter, we beg to remain,

Yours very truly,

A second writer restated the case of his firm as follows:

Gentlemen:

As I was the correspondent to answer your inquiry regarding our new prices on sheet-brass, I feel personally obliged to answer the letter sent from your office on the 10th of the month. I am sorry not to have explained more clearly why we have been compelled to issue new price-lists.

For six months we have known that we could not keep to our old prices on sheet-brass. Nearly four months ago the mills raised their price per pound on some grades, and this month they are revising upward their entire price list.

It has been our hope that prices might fall so that we could avoid asking more from our customers. For several weeks we have lost our profit on some grades while waiting for better quotations from the mills. Now, however, with still higher prices in sight, we can delay no longer. To do so would, in the end, mean going out of business.

You, of course, will now be obliged to get more for your finished product because of the increased cost of sheet-brass. Undoubtedly your customers will object, at first, to what seems an unreasonable demand. But they know about the small margin of profit in your line, and I am sure that an explanation from you will satisfy them that increases are imperative. If not, I am sure that we can help you. A letter from us for your use with unsatisfied customers will be the final proof that materials are costing you more money. I shall be glad at any time to write such a letter, or you may use the one now before you.

I need not add that we are ready to do whatever is possible in order to keep your business.

Yours faithfully,

This letter is effectively individual and original. The letter first quoted is an exaggerated example of the old time "favor-at-hand-beg-to-remain" type of

letter that is a fast-fading relic of the days when every letter was more or less a legal document.

12. *Naturalness.*—A marked characteristic of effective letters is naturalness of expression; that is, employing virtually the same words and sentences which the writer would use in a face-to-face interview.

The style of a letter must not be too informal, however, for the result would often be a tone too colloquial and familiar. Written speech is necessarily somewhat more formal than spoken; yet the expression of a letter, naturally written, closely resembles conversation. The correspondent will find that it will help him in taking the other man's point of view to write as tho he were speaking to the addressee.

Compare these two opening paragraphs.

1. In accordance with your request, we are sending you, under separate cover, a booklet which explains our plan of advertising.

2. As you request, we are sending you by this mail a booklet which tells all about our plan of advertising.

The second seems more natural, because it is more like what a person would say. It is more simple and direct. It makes use of shorter words. There is a close relationship between naturalness and simplicity and directness; likewise between naturalness and individuality and originality. All these characteristics of expression, when they appear in proper degree, help cause the reader to feel that the writer is genuinely sincere in what he says. Suppose, however, that the writer of the above opening paragraph had said:

I'll mail you right away a booklet on our advertising plan. This will tell you just what you want to know.

The tone is too familiar, unless the writer happens to be well acquainted with the reader. Written speech is nearly always somewhat more dignified than conversation.

13. *Economy.*—The natural tendency in business correspondence is toward economy: saving words and sentences as well as the reader's time and effort. True economy requires the use of enough words to make the right impression as well as the omission of more words than are necessary for an adequate expression of the thought. As in the case of originality, too many writers, in trying to avoid one extreme, swing to the other. The following letter illustrates this tendency:

Dear Sir:

We have yours of the 18th. As requested, are sending circulars describing the ——; also are inclosing photo.

Yours very truly,

This letter gives the reader an unfavorable impression of the writer and of the concern he represents. It suggests that the business in hand is so unimportant that it ought to be transacted as quickly, and with as little effort as possible. It causes the reader to feel that the writer is a gruff man and possibly too conscious of his own importance. In this case, true economy would require the use of more words. For instance:

We are glad to send you the inclosed description of the ——. Please let us know if we can be of further service.

This letter uses more words, but it gives the reader a better impression of the personality of the writer. "We have yours of the 18th" and "as requested" are unnecessary words in this case. The letter is a good example of false economy. The revision of it, just quoted, is more like natural oral expression.

14. *Correctness essential to effective presentation.* —As set forth in Chapter I, a letter may be effective and yet be incorrect as regards form, grammar and presentation. Nevertheless, such letters are nearly always handicapped by their incorrectness. Many men are greatly influenced in judgment by what others deem small things. They have formed the habit of making nice discriminations which turn on apparently slight differences, and they judge letters accordingly.

15. *Dictation.*—The ability to dictate a good letter comes with experience. But, like ability in writing a correct letter, facility in dictation is not sufficient. What is of first importance is definite knowledge of the purpose of a letter, and of the impression to be made upon the reader that will accomplish this purpose, and knowledge of the facts that will best serve to make each of the necessary impressions. In other words, a definite plan of action is necessary. Many letters are dictated without sufficient preparation. Altho the writer is not as clear in his own mind as he would like to be concerning what he wants to say, he

often feels that he must keep on talking. The result, as a rule, is a letter of the incoherent type and usually one of greater length than necessary. It is easier to keep right on talking and yet to make each word count if the talker first knows definitely what impression he wants to make. This is the fundamental basis of good dictation.

To talk to the addressee, not to the stenographer or out of the window, but to *see* the addressee—that, too, is a fundamental requirement in good dictation. It is also essential to concentrate on one letter at a time. But the most important thing is for the writer to be sure that all necessary information is at hand before beginning to dictate, and for him to be certain that he has the reader's point of view. Poor dictation is generally due to lack of information. Good dictation is not the result of fluency and accuracy of expression alone. It involves, first of all, effective business thinking, which, in turn, is based on adequate knowledge, as suggested in preceding chapters.

REVIEW

Compare the value of the thought and of its presentation.

What is effective presentation?

Will knowledge of "literary English" help or hinder a business man?

Explain the merits of concrete expression as compared to general or abstract expression.

Mention the chief evidences of personality in effective letters.

Why is expression in modern business correspondence becoming more natural?

What is meant by an economic use of words?

What are the chief essentials in good dictation?

CHAPTER V

WHY LETTERS FAIL

1. *Lack of good salesmanship.*—When sales letters fail to sell it is generally for the reason that they lack good salesmanship. In case the letter is designed to serve merely as one step in the selling process the most frequent evidence of poor salesmanship is the failure to consider certain circumstances or conditions which are the cause of the buyer's disinclination to make the purchase, or to do something else that the writer wants him to do.

These neglected circumstances or conditions affecting the addressee, in most cases, either are known to the sales correspondent or can be ascertained. For example, the writer of a sales letter often forgets that his addressee receives numerous other letters besides his, many of which hold little interest for him, and that therefore he seldom reads thru any selling letter unless it *does interest* him from the beginning.

2. *Meaning of the word "plan."*—Another common cause of failure is lack of good salesmanship in the "plan" of the letter. The plan is the outline of the letter; it should consist of all the important points to be included in the letter itself. It naturally fol-

lows, then, that in the plan special emphasis should be placed upon those phases of the offer which make it as easy as possible for the addressee to respond favorably, and as difficult as possible for him to respond unfavorably. The plan of sale or the plan of payment should also be given prominence.

In the case of form letters, it is especially important that the addressees be selected carefully, in order that the letter may be sent where it will have the best possible opportunity to make good. This choice of addressees is really a part of the plan. When letters are sent to persons who cannot or will not respond favorably, no matter how excellent the letter may be, the plan of the letter is fundamentally wrong. Such practice is directly contrary to the "service" idea in modern salesmanship.

3. *Function of a selling letter.*—This selling principle of offering a genuine service at the right time is of particular significance in the art of writing successful selling letters. It is part of the plan *behind* the letter. The initiative that is responsible for its being put into practice often originates at the factory, as in this case, where the inventor of the Copper Clad wire was the real creator of the plan *behind* the letter quoted in Chapter III, Section 5. The correspondent wisely took advantage of a good opportunity to bring together supply and demand. This is the main function of a sales correspondent. He often creates his opportunity, but usually it is his duty to be able to recognize real opportunities created by conditions of

demand, and to realize the relation of that demand to what he has to supply.

4. *Addressee wants facts.*—The day of cautious buying is here. In a majority of industries supply has caught up with demand, and competition is keen among sellers. Therefore buyers are encouraged to compare the offers of various sellers. In other words, they are less easily satisfied than formerly. They are also more cautious in their buying for another reason which has important bearing on sales correspondence. In the earlier stages of the present situation, when rapidly increasing supply in many lines was just beginning to cause strong competitive efforts among sellers, the salesmen, in their efforts to make sales, were inclined to make extravagant claims. Exaggeration was characteristic of salesmanship. Strong-arm methods were the rule rather than the exception. Sales letters as well as sales talks were full of emotional appeal designed to rush the buyer into a purchase. But now there is a tendency in the opposite direction, which is revealed in sales correspondence, as well as in other methods of selling, chiefly in the increasing use of facts. A better business basis is being established for sales letters.

"Give him facts. Give him the facts that will compel him to conclude for himself that it is best for him to accept your offer. Don't argue with him. Let him persuade himself in the light of the facts in the case." That is the substance of all the advice that

one well-known manufacturer gives his sales correspondents. It embodies a principle of good salesmanship that is based on a knowledge of human nature, for it is a familiar fact that nearly all people are more cautious in acting upon conclusions of other people than they are in acting upon conclusions of their own.

5. *Avoiding the obvious.*—When a writer of sales letters deliberately avoids general conclusions and general statements of his own opinions, he makes it just so much easier to fill his letter with "punch"; in other words, with facts, clearly and interestingly presented, which will influence his addressee to reach the desired conclusion. When he states conclusions as well as facts he usually makes the mistake of telling the reader something which the latter already knows. The effect is seldom good. The reader usually makes one or both of two reactions. Either he slightly resents the implication that he does not know the conclusions stated, or he considers it lightly, as something already known to him. Yet this mistake is often made. Here is an example:

Dear Sir:

Thrift is in the air. Everybody wants to save money. It's getting popular to be stingy. We are all counting the pennies. This is the day of essential commodities and essential service—or none at all.

Are you thoroly alive to this fundamental change in demand? Or do you still hope to sell the same kind of merchandise you sold before the war? Are you *fully* awake to *changed* conditions?

You probably are. If so, listen—

Since the very beginning of this business—26 years ago—our merchandising policy has aimed to reach thrifty people, because there are and always have been, so many of them. That policy is the keystone in the arch of our success.

That explains, too, why our business has more than doubled since the war began. Ours was the logical source of supply for thrift goods in your line. Hundreds of new accounts in your state looked to us to help them meet the demands of a thrift-bound public.

How well we are doing this—let our prices to you, for quick sale, on the enclosed offerings tell you.

You can't equal these prices anywhere else in this country. They are examples of our service to you under changed conditions.

Just an opening order—that's all we want now. The goods and the prices in our complete line—and it is *complete* notwithstanding present conditions—will keep you active on our books.

Yours very truly,

6. *Why this letter failed.*—In the first place, the dry goods merchant from whose waste-paper basket this letter was taken, had not read it beyond the second paragraph. He had not found anything not already known to him in the first part of the letter. He had glanced casually at the enclosed circular, but finding nothing there that he happened to need at the time, had taken but a mild interest in the prices. The fact that the prices were displayed in exceptionally large type, had caused him to feel that they were special offerings—bait—and not at all representative of the jobber's ability to sell at attractive prices. On the contrary, he suspected that the over-bold display of prices indicated lack of this ability.

This merchant was asked to read the letter thru. He complied reluctantly. Then, in answering the question as to why the letter would fail to sell him, he said, "I don't know just why. But somehow it doesn't hit me right at all. They seem to think I'm a boob because I don't give them some business. I know the war is tending to make people more thrifty. My trade doesn't buy the same stuff it used to, of course. It's my business to know what the people want. Oh, I suppose if I really needed any of those specials they offer, I'd get them—but I'm not so sure —I don't like the letter."

Thus this letter is a somewhat far-fetched example of letters that fail primarily because some of their statements are too obvious to the reader. His pride gets in the way.

Arguing to prove a fact before the fact is stated, is another fundamental mistake in this letter. The reason for ability to make a low price is stated before the reader's attention is called to specific examples of this ability. The price does not impress him as being so attractive as would be the case were he not led to expect an exceptionally low quotation, before it is given.

But it may be equally unwise to defend a low price after the price is stated—unless the price would not otherwise be recognized as low, or unless the low price would otherwise suggest merchandise of inferior quality and in reality not be a low price at all.

A statement of the reason for the price is often im-

perative. But in the case of the letter quoted above, the reason for low prices had better be stated after the prices are mentioned—and this applies in nearly all cases wherein obviously low prices are quoted. The merchant's first interest is in the goods and the prices. Certainly, he is not, in comparison, very much interested in having a letter inquire into his knowledge of what he may consider an unfavorable change in conditions.

7. *When to talk price.*—One reason for the failure of a great many letters is the writers choice of the wrong time to talk price. Even tho price may be the deciding factor in a sale, it is not always best to make a low price the chief selling argument. In the sale of tractors to farmers, for example, the questions that arise in nearly every farmer's mind, if he has never owned nor operated a tractor, would probably be these. "Do I need a tractor on my farm?" Then, "What tractor is best for conditions on my farm?" "What will it cost me?" "Could I get another kind of tractor that would give me about as good service but would cost me much less—enough less so that the saving would more than make up for the difference in quality?" "Where and how can I get, at least cost, this tractor which is best for me?"

As a rule, it is best to talk price after a strong feeling of need for the product has been aroused, unless this sense of need exists without the aid of the letter. Then it is usually best to make the talk about

the price short and to the point. If this matter of price is brought up too soon or is dwelt upon too long, it may get the reader's attention altogether on the cost and away from the profit or good service he is going to get out of his purchase. Too much emphasis on a low price has been the weakness of many letters. A strong conception of the cost, even tho it is exceptionally low, diverts attention from the uses of the commodity offered to chief resistance against its purchase. Anticipation of the pleasure and the profit to be gained from the use of a product or service, creates interest of the kind that makes sales. The correspondent's failure to pay enough attention to arousing and verifying this anticipation is a frequent cause of failure.

8. *Holding the reader's viewpoint in mind.*—Even a slight appreciation of the reader's point of view would prevent almost any one from writing a letter like that quoted in section 5 above.

Few, if any, merchants would welcome the assertion that customers are all buying just as little as possible, even tho this may not be true among the people they serve. The thought, as stated, is negative in its impression.

"Selling more goods when people are buying less —you can do this with your prices based on costs as given in the enclosed circular." That is the beginning of a revision of the letter in question. It carries a positive suggestion to the reader and gets his mind

onto results and off of conditions that hinder results. It arouses interest in the circular and causes the merchant to look at the special offerings from the point of view of how the items will sell at a price which represents a reasonable mark-up. The rest of this letter briefly suggests the opportunity a merchant has to add new faces to his following of regular customers. Its success was due in no small measure, however, to a more careful selection of items in the circular.

In short, the first version of this letter was not written with a clear idea of the impression it would make, or ought to make in order to gain the result wanted. The writer's and not the reader's viewpoint was held in mind. The thoughts which would have strongly tempted the writer to open an account with this jobber were not at all the thoughts which would so influence the retail merchant. A vision of new customers in his store as the direct result of better buying on his part—this, as the logical means of making up for decreased volume of business from his individual customers, is the thought or impression desired as the merchant looks over the offerings in the circular. It puts him in a buying mood, whereas the letter as quoted in paragraph 5 puts the reader out of the buying mood.

Again, the importance of accurate appreciation of the reader's point of view, held firmly in mind by the writer, is evident. The absence of this kind of in-

sight is perhaps the most fundamental of reasons why letters fail.

9. *Examples of other selling principles.*—Other selling rules which are usually lacking in letters that fail are the following:

"Lead the reader to do voluntarily what you want him to do." According to this rule, the writer must make his appeal in the body of the letter, and this is where it really should be made. If the correspondent does this, he will not find it necessary to make strained attempts at the end of the letter to get action. Any straining for effect is always apparent to the reader and causes antagonism. "Do it *today*. Don't delay another minute." Such exhortations and all their variations are seldom so effective as something like this: "These are the facts in the case. Now it is up to you. Your machine will be shipped the day your order reaches us."

That was the ending of a successful letter to the prospective purchaser of a typewriter. The letter consisted almost solely of a clear statement of facts, and each fact explained a distinctive feature of the machine. The addressee in this case wanted a machine, but was undecided as to which make he would buy. He was interested in *facts* only. These facts led him to want this machine, and without being urged he sent in his order voluntarily.

"Be a good listener" is another important selling principle that is just as applicable in sales corre-

spondence as it is in personal salesmanship. It involves anticipation of exactly what the reader would say if the writer were talking to him instead of writing a letter. The great advantage of oral salesmanship as compared with sales correspondence is that the salesman can answer directly every question as soon as the prospect asks it. But the sales correspondent can and must be a good "listener" in imagination. Many letters fail because the writer has not realized the importance of this requirement.

"Respect the addressee." More than one letter is unsuccessful because it contains a tone of disrespect. The "big" man in business is inclined to talk down to men with smaller business interests, altho in many cases the big man is really the servant of the many "little" men on whom he depends for business. Lack of appreciation of the true business relationship that exists between writer and reader often causes a letter to fail.

Keep the reader in the letter; cause him to get a realistic picture of the good his acceptance of your offer will bring to him. Thus principles of salesmanship which form the basis of successful correspondence might be multiplied. A knowledge of these principles is essential in good salesmanship, and a lack of this knowledge is nearly always characteristic of the unsuccessful correspondent.

10. *Know human nature.*—The practice of the principles that have been discussed is merely a question of taking advantage of past experience. The

principles are of especial value in stimulating an investigation into the causes of success and failure. Since they are based on a knowledge of the traits of human nature, this knowledge of human nature is really the fundamantal requirement. If, for instance, the correspondent realizes the fact that people are most eager to supply the need that is most pressing at the time, he will be less likely to make such mistakes as that of talking price too soon in his letters. Or if he knows that all men like to feel that they are acting on their own initiative, the writer will be more likely to avoid stating baldly his own opinions. The correspondent must possess knowledge of human nature, especially the "human nature" of the individual addressee, before he can successfully adjust himself to the reader's point of view.

11. *Why adjustment to the reader is often difficult.* —The extent of the difference between the writer's own environment and experience and those of the reader determines the degree of difficulty that this adjustment will involve. Therefore, the greater this difference the greater should be the correspondent's effort to visualize completely and accurately, from all the facts available, the environment that causes the reader's point of view to be what it is.

The most successful sales correspondent in an eastern wholesale house that sells principally to general merchants, was himself at one time in the same business as the merchants to whom he writes. He therefore finds it easy to take the point of view of his

readers. Cases like this are by no means rare. But it is comparatively difficult for a sales correspondent who earns perhaps thirty or forty dollars a week, to appreciate the point of view of the man whose income is several times as large. Here is a case that will illustrate this point.

A sales correspondent for a phonograph company, whose salary is forty-five dollars a week, failed to sell a prospect who was later easily sold by a letter from the general manager. The main difference between the methods of these two men was the fact that the forty-five-dollar man was trying to sell a $100 machine, while the general manager talked about a $200 machine. But this general manager knew from experience that he could not do as well as his correspondent in handling the average customer with an income of about $150 a month.

The best way to be able to understand the "human nature" of others is to *know* their environment by actual experience. If this is not possible, strong and sympathetic imagination is the best substitute for experience. When one realizes that not all correspondents have the advantage possessed by the general manager just mentioned, he will appreciate the special importance of good imagination in written salesmanship.

REVIEW

What is the fundamental cause of failure in the writing of sales letters?

Why are facts more effective than argument?

Why should the correspondent avoid making statements that tell obvious facts?

Why should he anticipate the questions that will arise in the reader's mind?

What is the best use of selling principles? Mention some sound selling principles.

When is adjustment to the reader's point of view most difficult?

CHAPTER VI

WHY LETTERS MAKE GOOD

1. *Value of knowing why a letter makes good.*—A sales correspondent in a wholesale house noticed an improvement in the results of his letters just after he had returned from a trip south among the merchants with whom he had been corresponding. He was curious concerning the cause of this improvement and in an attempt to find an explanation he compared carbons of letters written before his trip with those of letters written after his return. There was a noticeable increase in warmth and cordiality in his more recent letters. The tone indeed was so apparent that he feared he had been overdoing it. Yet, since his very cordial letters had brought better returns than the others, he decided that they must have produced the right effect upon his readers—that the readers had not considered the cordiality overdone. He reflected upon the impressions he had received from letters sent to him, and concluded that what might seem to the writer an excessively cordial tone would not, in most cases, impress the reader as such. He experimented upon a number of similar cases, writing letters of various degrees of cordiality and was surprised at the marked difference in returns, with re-

sults in favor of the more cordial letters, especially those in which the cordiality was very marked in the opening sentences.

Two letters identical except as to the opening paragraphs illustrate this point. The two different openings follow.

I

In response to your welcome inquiry of the tenth, it gives us a great deal of pleasure to report big sales and numerous repeat orders on our Honor Brand overalls, in all parts of the country. This brand is made up especially for us and according to our own specifications—*your* specifications, I ought to say, because we have built into this brand suggestions from many merchants who were kind enough to tell us exactly what their trade wanted. Briefly, Mr. Eppinger, here are the specifications:

II

Your inquiry of the tenth is about a brand of overalls which enjoys big sales and numerous repeat orders in all parts of the country. This brand is made up especially for us according to specifications which were suggested by merchants who told us exactly what their trade wanted. Briefly, here are the specifications:

The letter with the first opening brought twice as good results as that with the second, tho the latter appears perhaps more businesslike in tone. Merchants like to have letters get right down to business, but this quality need not rule out the cordial tone. It is quite consistent to write a letter that is both concise and cordial, as will be shown in the following section.

The point here involved is that this correspondent

let the little word "why" reveal the means of making his letters uniformly more successful. Whether a letter was a success or a failure, he would ask himself, Why? and then build future letters on the information that the answer to that question revealed.

2. *Conciseness and good nature.*—Letters that make good are often concise and good-natured. Many "concise" letters, however, are brief in a mechanical fashion. They suggest brusqueness. They often give the reader a distinct impression that the writer "feels his oats," and considers his time too valuable to waste much of it in writing his letters. "Yours of the 10th received. Goods shipped by express on the 8th," and so on. That is the brusque tone. Compare it with this:

Dear Sir:—From Aa A1 to L4—from less than $500 to $1,000,000 and over.

In Maine—in California—Minnesota—Mississippi—and in the states between—you will find adding machines of one style or another.

It serves the Standard Oil Company (Aa A1) and it serves the Little Fellow (L4) and thousands of concerns not so large or so small.

For some it adds and handles 10,000 items per day, where less than 800 were handled before. For others it subtracts and makes an equal saving of time.

Again we find it on multiplication, with its exclusive printed proof, doing 350 to 400 invoices (correctly) where only 225 to 260 came thru before.

Division—as in pro-rating, analysis, etc.—keeps it busy with some of our friends.

All these features wrapped up in a —— Portable (22 lb.)

Machine with an unusual capacity (9 billion) and a low price.

What will you do about it? Just arrange to look at this machine by filling in the inclosed card. *Absolutely* no obligation to purchase.

Very truly yours,
General Sales Manager.

This letter made good. It combines true conciseness of thought and expression with the subtle good nature that seems to be the result of the writer's confidence in his product. The punctuation is not in entire accordance with orthodox rules, but the sentences are free from elisions of the mechanical sort. This letter is human and personal notwithstanding its conciseness. To say much in a small space as this writer does and yet make the expression easy to read, and not labored or mechanical in tone, is characteristic of the art of the most expert writers of effective business English.

Abraham Lincoln was master of the suggestive and natural conciseness that is the sincere style of expression in the letters of the best writers among present-day executives. A study of Lincoln's letters would be helpful to any one who wants to develop this style of expression, a style that is characteristic of men whose judgment is mature and whose knowledge of human nature and the subject matter of their letters is comprehensive. Of most fundamental importance, however, is the comprehensive knowledge of human nature and of conditions.

3. *Deference.*—Many letters make good because

the writer shows sincere deference to the reader, somewhat as a good host shows deference to his guest. Consider, for example, the two following paragraphs from the letter of an executive to his salesmen.

> We all agree, I feel sure, that buyers of paper are busy men with many other important duties clamoring for their attention. Therefore I have secured many good customers by suggesting—after I had got pretty well acquainted with them—that they let me act as their buyer and take over all their responsibility for purchasing paper that best fills their requirements.
>
> Now, if you are not already doing this in certain cases, I believe the suggestion is a good one. We know that buyers of paper waste—and know that they waste—much time in seeing many salesmen in an uneconomical attempt to save money. They could save this time for other duties—*if* a salesman of paper of standard quality, a salesman big enough to be trusted to guard the interests of his client, were available.

Altho the writer was the president of a big paper concern, nothing in the letter would suggest anything but that the writer is one salesman who is talking to another. The kind of respect for employes evident in this letter is genuine in executives who accomplish most in training their men.

As a rule, when one gets a letter from a big corporation which seems to talk down *at* him rather than up *with* him, he will find it was written by some young man in the organization who has yet to learn the value of deference toward his addressee under all conditions. It is not necessarily egotism in the young correspondent that causes him to reveal in his letters his feeling

of importance, but generally it is a false notion that the bigness and power of the business concern with which he is connected needs to be impressed on each addressee. The right degree of humility—without any suggestion of servility, of course—is often the principal cause of a letter's making good. Consider the following letter, which pulled largely because it shows a frank recognition of the addressee's knowledge of his own business.

May we suggest the use of —— hotel locks in the new Inman Hotel. No doubt you are considering the use of our series of locks with functions and master-key combinations designed for modern hotels. They find favor wherever used. The indicating attachments, by which a chambermaid can tell whether a room is occupied without trying the door, and other special features are proving a great source of satisfaction.

Our authorized agents, the —— Hardware Company, will be pleased to show you samples and quote you prices, and we trust you will call on them.

This letter went to a contractor whose duty it was to know about all kinds of locks. It shows good salesmanship in its restraint.

4. *Vivid expression.*—It is often necessary, however, to make use of less subtle principles of salesmanship, such as concrete and vivid expression. For instance, here is a letter to merchants from a wholesale house whose sales correspondents take advantage of up-to-date information concerning the needs of their addressees, furnished by the traveling salesmen of the firm. If a merchant happens to be weak on

show-window salesmanship, for example, he might get a letter which starts out like this:

A good tip ought to be passed along. Therefore I want to tell you how Jones, who has a store like yours in Smithville, in your State, worked up a big business in stock patterns of high-grade dinner china.

We know that few people can afford to buy a complete set of good dinner ware all at one time; yet there's not a woman in town but wants to own a fine set, and Jones makes it possible for them to buy one piece at a time and yet take advantage of his free offer to replace broken pieces, as may be necessary, to the extent of five dollars' worth.

One day each week Jones uses both his windows for a big display of these stock patterns. Each piece bears a separate price ticket. The entire set of 100 pieces amounts to $55.40. A large placard announces that five dollars' worth will be given free when an entire set is purchased—and that a set can be purchased piece by piece, or as many pieces can be bought at one time as may be desired. He gives a small red purchase ticket with each sale, with the amount of the sale stamped upon it. As soon as the customer has these checks amounting to $55.40, she can redeem them all by an additional free selection of the dinner ware amounting altogether to five dollars.

Jones is having big success with this plan. Of course, occasionally, when a customer wants to pay cash for an entire set, he lets the set go at $50.40. But that is the only advantage that those who purchase an entire set at one time get over the women who purchase their sets piece by piece. One gets five dollars; the other five dollars' worth of dishes free.

This letter runs two full pages, single space. It tells why the plan it mentions is good, and gives definite figures on the number of sets Jones sold in a certain period of time, his profits, and so on. It is a good

example of a concrete appeal that stimulates both wholesale and retail sales at one stroke. It is different from the type of vivid expression that is made mechanically vivid for the obvious purpose of coercing the reader's attention, as for example, letters that begin somewhat like this:

That watch in your pocket—what kind is it? "A good one," you say. All right, I believe you. Oh, "no good"? All right, I believe you. It is your watch; you ought to know.

Mr. Hobson is a big man in advertising in your city. He is advertising manager of one of your biggest department stores. No doubt you know him. Well, he says the —— machine cut his printing expense in half last year.

Now, why should you not believe him just as you expect to be believed when you tell me what kind of a watch you own?

In order to realize the lack in a letter like this, imagine a salesman walking briskly up to a prospective customer and saying, "What kind of a watch is that in your pocket? Is it any good?" "Yes?" "All right. I believe you," and so on.

Illustrations are occasionally good, however, when they are closely and logically connected with the main purpose of the letter. For example, the following letter to "dead accounts" on the records of a retail mail-order house was successful.

Dear Customer:

When Lincoln was running for President he met an old-time friend, a former neighbor. The man said:

"Abe, I'd like mighty well to vote for you, but I can't.

You voted wrong on the Mexican War question when you were in Congress."

Lincoln said, "John, if your old rifle flashed in the pan once you wouldn't throw it away, would you?"

"No," was the answer.

"Well, suppose I did vote wrong on that question, you're not going to turn against me because I made one mistake, are you?"

"I never thought about it that way, Abe. I'm with you."

It's possible that we have "flashed in the pan" on one of your orders.

If you think we have fallen short of our ideal—if, in your estimation, you have not always received a square deal—will you write me personally all about it? I feel sure that I can make it right.

I am sending you a copy of our special bargain list, "THRIFT." Its name well describes its purpose. It will show you better than a lot of words the money-saving opportunities your old house offers you.

To insure your letter reaching me, kindly use the envelop inside this catalog.

Our large new catalog, No. 85, is now ready for distribution—it is better than ever. Your name and address on the inclosed card will bring it. It will make money for you.

5. *Liveliness.*—Among a large assortment of letters that are known to have made good, nearly all of them read rapidly. Short and crisp sentences predominate. While long sentences are not necessarily lethargic in their effect, yet they are seldom as good as short sentences. Notice, for instance, the deadening effect of the following long paragraphs:

I am having inclosed with this letter some illustrations of the new ——, Demi-Limousine Top, with which we are now supplying our dealers, listed to sell at $195.

The introduction of this desirable feature into our already comprehensive line should lend added force to the arguments I have been presenting you recently in my effort to interest you in the idea of taking the —— agency for your territory.

Your own experience will confirm the fact that since the automobile has become a daily necessity in the lives of most motor-car owners, rather than just a vehicle for pleasure, it is more and more being used in all kinds of weather, and not just on sunshiny days when the going is good.

Therefore, having an all-weather, all-purpose car is not only desirable, but with most people it is necessary. This fact is responsible for a very pronounced and widespread demand for better protection against inclement weather than is afforded by even the best sort of quick-acting curtains.

This demand is satisfactorily met by the Detachable Top of Limousine type, because such a top offers all the comforts and conveniences, as well as the luxurious appearance, of a regular Limousine body, and enables those who cannot afford to keep both a touring car and a limousine to have the practical advantages of both.

The rest of the letter is written in the same sleepy style. Compare it with the following:

The new —— Demi-Limousine Top (see the illustration inclosed) is listed to sell at $195.

This addition to our big line is another reason why you had better take the —— agency.

Since the automobile is now a *daily necessity* with many owners, *adequate* protection in bad weather is demanded. The Detachable Top of Limousine type fills this demand. Comfortable, convenient, luxurious, it is both a touring car and a Limousine to those who cannot afford both.

Thus a two-page letter may be livened up merely by condensation. The letter in which long sentences predominate, like the letter quoted above, no matter

how perfect the construction, seems longer than it really is; and it is nearly always longer than it ought to be.

6. *The thought.*—While the expression of nearly all letters that get action possesses liveliness, that characteristic is not a fundamental cause of their success. Many letters that are lively in expression fail, and often letters that seem to be somewhat sleepy in expression somehow turn the trick. The big difference between letters, like the big difference between salesmen, is in the kind of thought they employ; and the thought that is not actually expressed in the letter is as important as the thought that finds definite expression in its pages.

A letter that begins, "We beg to invite your attention to the fares and the excellent train service of the —— —— Railroad from New York when you arrange your return journey," succeeds because the man who planned the letter is wide awake to an opportunity. This letter is sent to incoming guests who register at hotels, with special reference to the guests who indicate to the hotel clerk any interest in train service.

A letter might violate all the technical rules of the game and yet succeed on account of its timeliness. To send the letter where and when the service it offers is most welcome, is the foundation of the thought that causes letters to make good. In a summary of the more fundamental characteristics of successful sell-

ing letters, this kind of thought occupies a prominent place.

The successful selling letter is not the result of the ability to write with original word twists that command admiration rather than profits, but rather of creative planning in the light of all the facts in the case, a knowledge of the sales significance of the facts, and the ability to build a sincere message of genuine service based on these facts. In other words, it takes hard work to plan really successful letters; that is the main reason why they are scarce. Unless the writer possesses enough intelligence and experience to be able to plan his own letters, it is not likely that he will be able to write one that is planned by somebody else, for there is a vital connection between the thought behind the letter and the thought in it.

7. *Special inducements.*—In a selling letter the special inducements that are offered are often important causes of success—such as the premium offer in the letter (page 231) which sells paint "from paint-maker to farmer." These inducements serve as a substitute for the personal salesman's advantage in bringing to bear upon the buyer a strong personal influence that gets immediate action. Many letters persuade a reader that he ought to buy, but still he may not buy simply because he lays the letter aside and lets other matters crowd it out of his mind. If the plan includes the offer of a premium on immediate response, this difficulty is often solved.

The principal necessity, however, is to induce desire for what is offered by talking up its *use*. The ideal letter is the one that gets the order without asking for it directly. As a rule, a special inducement is effective—*after* desire for what is offered has been aroused. Even an attractive offer of discount, or a time limit on a special offer, or any one of the many other schemes to get immediate response, will seldom succeed alone. Just because a writer has developed a good plan whereby to get response, he is not entitled to feel that his task of whetting desire may be neglected. Also, it is well to make it plain to the reader that any special inducement has a reason for its existence other than simply to get him to respond.

8. *Example of a good plan.*—A manufacturer of farm machinery got good returns on a very long letter, the first five pages of which were devoted to arousing the farmer's desire for a cream-separator. Response was secured by means of several selling plans that were presented in the last part of the letter. The final three pages are a good illustration of what is meant by special inducements. They read as follows:

Now, next, I want to talk to you about my plan of selling. Turn right over to page 42 in the catalog and read these plans over.

I don't know how to get out any more liberal plans than these.. I've a great deal of faith in American farmers, and I am not afraid to offer them any kind of plan they want. That is why I offer these three different plans. Just pick out the one you want.

Of course, the cash plan, No. 1, is the cheapest and best because we make a lower price, and you have just as good protection on this plan as on any of them. Nine out of every ten orders we get are on this plan because we have put up a bond of $25,000 with the National Bank of this city, so that in case you buy for cash and are not pleased, thru this bond you can get your money at the end of the approved test.

We also have a bank deposit plan and a note-settlement plan, as explained on page 42. Pick out whichever one you want.

On the note-settlement plan, you will notice, we have charged a little more for the separator. We have to do this on account of making allowance for bad accounts, collections, and so on, so that really if you want to buy on the note-settlement plan you will find it is cheaper to go right to your banker and borrow the money, pay cash and get a low price, and you are not helping to pay for somebody else's bad debts.

Now then, my proposition is this:

In order to get these separators started in your locality, I will agree that, if you sit down and carefully select from your neighborhood names of from fifteen to twenty-five good farmers that you think might be interested in buying a cream separator, and send these names in to me with your order for a separator, I will do this:

I will write each of them a personal letter, telling them all about my separator, and that they can see it at work over at your place. I, of course, will not write to them until after you have tried the separator for yourself and are thoroly satisfied it is the separator for you, so that if any of them should call you up, or call and see you, you can conscientiously tell them your honest opinion about the machine.

I am sure, from the experience I have had with this very same proposition on manure-spreaders and gasoline engines, that when they see that separator of ours work, if they are in the market for a separator at all, it simply means that they will buy one, because it is without doubt or question the greatest value in cream-separators ever offered for the money by any manufacturer in the United States, no matter who.

Now, here's what I will do which will interest you!

For every sale I make from that list within one year from the date you purchase, I will give you five dollars for your cooperation, and yet I don't require you to do any work except to tell these people in your own way what you think about the machine.

I can afford to do this in order to get in touch with farmers who ought to have cream-separators, because just as soon as these farmers get my letter and go to your place and see the machine, some of them are going to order one.

This is a chance for us to make a few sales within the next year, and we can do it without very much work either.

Others have done it and you can do it.

I am not going to make this proposition all the time; I am just making it to get this wonderful new cream-separator started.

I am anxious to get a cream-separator into every square mile of the United States that I possibly can during the next twelve months, because I know just as sure as I am writing this letter that if you buy one of these separators and your neighbors see it, within the next year there is going to be a number of them want separators like it.

Now, I have been perfectly frank with you and have come right out and made you my proposition in as frank a way as I know how, and there are no conditions nor strings to it.

And I want you to be perfectly frank with me and tell me whether or not you can accept it.

I am going to make this proposition good for 15 days from this date, and I would like to hear from you within that time with your order and a nice list of farmers' names.

Well, I guess you will think this is a long letter, but we are about at the end of it. Just think over what I have said. Read it over again, if necessary, to get it thoroly in mind, and remember this:

That, first, I have a separator that is up to date, built on the right principle, and right absolutely.

Then, second, the price to you is right down to the chalk

mark, and below what some manufacturers who make only a few separators can make them for at actual shop cost.

And, third, I give you a 90-days' unconditional approval test, you to be the judge.

And fourth, this is a special proposition which is a good one; it has paid others big money and ought to pay you if you accept it.

Can you afford to pass up this opportunity?

Will you let me send you one of these separators on trial? I know that after you try it you will keep it; then I can add you to my already long list of friends who have bought in this very same way.

I am glad you wrote me, and it is a pleasure for me to answer your inquiry. I want to hear from you by return mail, and have you tell me how you stand on this proposition so I will know what to figure on in your locality.

Yours very truly,

9. *Merchandise letters.*—In an effort to command interest, irrespective of a sound economic cause of interest, many writers of sales letters have been led to overdo the so-called "human interest" appeal. In selling baby buggies, for instance, there is the tendency to talk about the baby and the baby's health rather than about the fine points of the baby buggy itself.

The idea of the "merchandise letter" is well illustrated in a long letter—usually nine or ten pages—sent out each season by a mail-order retailer of ladies' ready-to-wear clothing. All but one of these nine or ten pages are devoted to news about merchandise, classified so that the reader may readily find what is said about the kind of merchandise she is most in-

terested in at the time she gets the letter. The letter is sent out over the signature of a young woman, who explains her connection in the first part of the letter as follows:

> You will see by this letterhead that the —— employs me to give all orders from customers in your territory personal attention. There is no charge whatever for my services. Please write me as freely and as often as you wish. I am employed to make your dealings with this house as pleasant and as satisfactory as possible by giving all your requests personal and individual attention.

Thus the personal element is introduced at the beginning of the letter, all the rest of which is devoted to giving the addressee information about merchandise. The writer takes full advantage of the interest that women have in current styles, as follows:

> LADIES' DRESSES
>
> Silk Taffeta Dresses are very fashionable this season, and No. 10,629, on page 9, is one of our most attractive models. It is a dress of unusual beauty and becomingness. Another dress I am sure you will like is No. 10,701, on page 26, a beautiful model of lustrous Silk Charmeuse. The fashionable bolero style fronts are becoming to any type of figure.
>
> Two very attractive dresses, made of splendid quality All-Wool Worsted Serge, are No. 10,636, on page 10, illustrated in color on page 11, and No. 10,642, on page 13, illustrated in color on page 12.
>
> If you admire the fashionable jacket effect as much as I do, you will like No. 10,613, on page 5. I consider it one of the prettiest models in our line, and the lustrous Silk-and-Cotton Poplin used in making it is one of the newest and best liked dress materials.

LADIES' SUITS

Probably the one most attractive Suit in the "National" line is No. 24,708, pictured in color and described on page 144 of your Style Book. This suit is made of a splendid quality All-Wool Worsted Poplin. It embodies the newest style features, including the semi-fitted belted coat and the new flare skirt.

Suit No. 24,711, on the same page, is also a favorite model. It is a very fashionable suit made of one of the most becoming of the new Fall fabrics and has an attractive fur-trimmed collar. Be sure to look at the picture of this suit.

A clothing manufacturer, by taking advantage of the same interest, makes effective an otherwise commonplace letter designed to help the firm's dealers sell overcoats:

Dear Sir:—

You will see three types of overcoats on the street this fall. Many young men will wear Varsity Six Hundred, a close-fitting, single or double breasted coat with wide velvet collar. It is a rather short coat.

Older men will stick to the Chesterfield; some young men prefer it. This is a knee-length, conservative coat.

Other men will wear a loose box-back coat. They like the ease and comfort of it.

All of these coats are on sale in our store. They are made by ——. Many are silk-lined.

The prices are $18 to $35.

We'll be glad to show you the coat you prefer.

Yours truly,

10. *After the sale.*—A letter that is designed to cause the utmost satisfaction in a purchase that has been made, and thus to be an indirect influence in bringing about repeat orders, is used by a furniture

manufacturer with good results. Part of this letter follows:

Dear Sir:

The #1104 desk on your order #9,647 was shipped yesterday, and will reach you soon.

And upon receipt of it I want you to do me a favor. I want you to examine it—see if you have been getting any such values for the money from any one else.

That panel bottom in the pedestal below the center drawer is set in a groove, is a three-ply panel, and makes the pedestal absolutely dust-proof.

All drawer bottoms are three-ply, built-up stock, set in a groove framed in all around. And look at the fit of the drawers—the dovetailing at the back and at the front. Notice the width of the drawer rails and the way they are built into the legs.

Those sockets at the bottom of the legs are not spun brass. They are cast brass, made to last a lifetime.

Thus the letter points out the qualities of good construction in a desk, and at the same time shows that this desk possesses them. It ends with a guarantee of all these good qualities and asks that the customer look for them when he opens up a desk. The method and plan of this letter reflect the modern spirit of salesmanship as embodied in all progressive houses, which is to take as much interest in satisfying the customer after the sale as in making promises and forecasts of satisfaction before the sale is consummated. This is somewhat the same spirit as that of the retail clothing merchant who started a successful letter with this paragraph:

The head of this concern, in case of emergency, is perfectly willing to deliver your suit in person. That's our idea of "service"—to give every man what he wants exactly when he wants it.

11. *Rules of the art.*—The writing of effective letters is an art, but not a science in the sense that it is founded upon certain definitely fixed principles. As mentioned several times in other chapters few, if any, "rules" of this art apply in all cases. There is a tendency to misapply and to overdo the application of selling principles. The mistake of blindly following rules—for instance, even such a sound admonition as that which bids us talk effects rather than ends—is more prevalent in written than in oral salesmanship. In written salesmanship there is less immediate knowledge of the conditions that nullify the good effect of the rule than there is in personal salesmanship. Consequently, there is less opportunity for adaptation to the individual buyer.

Even the "rule" that the correspondent should possess a knowledge of the individual addressee's point of view on the proposition, and of the economic conditions which cause that point of view to be what it is, and that the writer should use this knowledge in deciding what to say and how to say it—even this does not seem to be sufficiently fundamental to warrant its application in all cases. And yet it states the most important of all requirements. Other considerations of more or less universal importance have

been emphasized in preceding chapters, but as far as practical and universal usefulness are concerned, they are inferior in import to a keen appreciation of the reader's point of view—the alpha and omega of the art of writing effective letters.

REVIEW

Why is it important to know why letters fail or succeed?

Explain the value of conciseness. Of deference.

Explain the value and the risk of "special inducements."

Contrast the value of "merchandise" and "human interest" letters.

What kind of letter may follow the sale, and what is its value?

To what extent should "rules" guide the business correspondent?

CHAPTER VII

TYPES OF LETTERS

1. *Classification of general business correspondence.* —The term, general business correspondence, designates all kinds of letters that are not direct sales letters. Sales letters are designed to influence directly the sale of a product or service. As pointed out in Chapter I, all types of letters have some influence on sales. They differ in the degree of influence. This fact furnishes a good basis of classification. The letters that have the least direct influence on sales would represent one extreme, while those designed to effect an immediate sale of a particular product or service would represent the other. Between these extremes we find various types of letters, each more or less directly related to sales, and all of them directly related to the development of good-will toward the house.

The usual main divisions of a classification of correspondence are order, traffic, adjustment, credit and collection, buying and selling. In addition to these there are letters with remittances, letters concerning separate enclosures, letters of introduction, recommendation or indorsement, letters of instruction, in-

terdepartmental and interhouse letters, letters of contract, letters asking, giving, and refusing information, and so on.

It would be difficult to work out a logical arrangement of all the various types of letters which would apply in all kinds of business. As a rule, incoming mail is assorted according to the official or the department that ought to handle it. It is important to have a definite understanding as to which official or which department shall handle each of the various types of letters received. Often the wrong man in an organization handles a letter because there has been a failure to classify the incoming mail according to types and to assign each kind of letter to the official or the department that can best handle it. The exercise of care and judgment in classifying and assigning types of letters in any organization is highly desirable.

2. *"Routine" letters.*—Because many executives look upon letter-writing as a necessary evil and an arduous task, they are strongly tempted to apply the "let-George-do-it" principle. Consequently, very often they fail to realize the true importance of certain types of letters, and intrust incompetent persons with important correspondence. Their wrong attitude influences them also to make inefficient use of mechanical aids in writing letters, such as form letters and paragraphs.

It is true, of course, that many letters are "routine" in nature, and comparatively simple and easy to write, and that cases in which the details are funda-

mentally similar are frequently so numerous as to make it advisable not to dictate a different letter for each case. And yet many business houses make the mistake of cutting down the immediate expense of correspondence by the use of form letters and form paragraphs in "routine" letters.

Should any letter be considered "routine"? The idea that some letters are "routine" can hardly be reconciled with the belief that every letter is a selling letter. The correspondent who holds the first theory will not attach the true importance to every letter that is written.

The fact that a letter seems to be only remotely or indirectly related to sales is not evidence that it does not influence sales. One might just as well say that a bookkeeper, because he is not a salesman, exerts no influence upon the salesman's work. This, of course, is not true; a bookkeeper's failure to credit the right account with a payment might easily lead to the loss of that account. The same principle holds in both cases; the great influence of indirect causes on sales. "Every letter a selling letter" involves a point of view very similar to that of the motto, "Every office man a salesman." From this standpoint, the "routine" letter does not exist. This does not mean, however, that the use of form letters and form paragraphs should be done away with, as is later explained. But it does mean that *every* letter ought to be written with a full realization of its importance, that the "routine" letter requires as much keen selling sense on

the part of the writer as the direct sales letter—often more.

3. *Form paragraphs and freshness of thought.*—It is perhaps unwise either to condemn or to advocate, unreservedly, the use of form letters and form paragraphs. For instance, there is hardly justification for feeling, as many do, that the principle involved in the use of form paragraphs is fundamentally wrong. As a matter of fact, it would be easier to demonstrate that the principle itself is fundamentally right, for the idea is to use the one best paragraph for making a particular impression on a certain reader under definitely known conditions. That is the ideal, and repeated use of the paragraph is right or wrong according to whether repetition does or does not interfere with the attainment of this ideal.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of form letters and paragraphs in the case of correspondents who have a great many similar letters to write is not so much the saving in time as the increased effectiveness of the letter. When a correspondent dictates virtually the same letter many times, he is likely to be affected by the monotony of the process, and his thought will lose its freshness and become mechanical. This feeling is somehow conveyed to the reader, who is sensitive to the lack of enthusiasm in the writer. An appropriate use of form paragraphs is helpful in such a case, since they will show the thought and effort that was originally expended upon them.

4. *How to retain freshness of thought and expres-*

sion.—The question of how to retain freshness of thought and expression is an important problem for all business correspondents, especially for those who deal with many similar cases. The man who handles complaints usually has many similar cases to manage, as do the credit and collection men, as well as the man who handles the less highly specialized types of letters, which are classified as "routine" correspondence. In fact, failure to retain fresh interest in each case and to keep letters free from a dead, mechanical tone seems to be a common failing among nearly all writers of business letters, and not alone among those who do nothing but write letters day in and day out.

No correspondent should call himself expert if he allows himself to fall into a rut because he is obliged to dictate many letters of the same general type. As far as he is concerned, there ought to be no such thing as similar letters. If he forms the habit of dictating each letter to a living individual—if he vividly *sees* the person to whom he is writing, he will not fall into the error of thinking that the letters are alike.

How can the correspondent acquire the habit of sensing and noting small but important differences that are characteristic of various addressees? First, he should accept the fact that each addressee is different from all the others. Next, he should be on the alert to find, thru experience, that the task of getting at the points of difference in each case will increase interest in dictating each letter so that it will best fit

the case in hand. If he is successful thus far, he will learn that this interest calls for concentration of attention on each case as it is handled, and it is this interested concentration that both makes a letter fresh in thought and expression, and renders the writing of it agreeable to the correspondent.

5. *Correspondence in the order department.*— Considerable attention has been given to the problem of freshness of thought and expression, not only because nearly all correspondents are inclined to write lifeless letters when they have to deal with many similar cases, but also because there is an inclination to consider certain kinds of letters of much less importance than other kinds. This is particularly true in connection with the correspondence in the order department, which includes letters acknowledging the receipt of orders, and notifications of shipments and delayed shipments as well as of inability to fill the order, substitutions and so on. All of these letters may be and ought to be made the means of developing good-will, even in cases where it is necessary to write something that will be displeasing to the customer, such as a notification of temporary "outs," or of mistakes which the customer has made in filling out his order.

All such "routine" letters should possess the chief characteristics of effective letters, given in Chapter III. If the writer will bear in mind the essentials of a good letter, it is not likely, in acknowledging a rush order, that he will write a letter like this:

Dear Sir:—

We beg to acknowledge herewith the receipt of your order of September 10th. Thank you.

In accordance with your instructions, we will fill this order immediately and will ship it at the earliest possible moment. We feel sure it will reach you in first-class shape and prove satisfactory in every way.

Again thanking you for this order, and trusting that we may be allowed to serve you again, we are

Yours very truly,

From the reader's point of view, this letter lacks freshness of thought and expression. It has a sing-song tone. In a similar case another correspondent wrote as follows:

Dear Sir:—

Your order, dated September 10th, is being carefully and quickly filled, and ought to be on its way to Peoria by American Express this evening.

We thank you for this order and are looking forward to the pleasure of serving you again soon.

Very truly yours,

This letter has the right tone. It is definite and illustrates the economical use of words. It shows better salesmanship.

The first letter, altho it does not say as much, uses about twice as many words. It fails to give that impression of action which is so essential if the customer is to be convinced that he is being served efficiently.

The conclusion of the second letter, "We thank you for this order and are looking forward to the pleasure

of serving you again soon," suggests that the correspondent knows that his house has done its work satisfactorily.

The mention of the addressee's town gives this letter a definite touch of individuality. With the exception of the name of his own concern and his own name, a successful business man likes best to hear the name of his own town. This letter, tho economical of words, is natural in expression. Thus, nearly all the chief characteristics of an effective letter might be found in this "routine" letter.

6. *Case of a delayed shipment.*—The following letter is another example of the mistake of overdoing an impression. It was sent to a business man who wrote about his order for a book that did not arrive within three days after he had received a letter acknowledging his order and informing him that the book had been sent.

Dear Sir:

We are indeed deeply sorry to learn from your letter of the 18th that you, up to that time, had not received the copy of Rider's "Freedom" which we sent you.

The book was temporarily out of stock, however, and was not shipped until two or three days after our letter of the 8th was mailed to you. The book was forwarded as soon as a new supply was received from the binders, and should have reached you by this time.

If it has not come to hand, let us know, and we will be glad to send you a duplicate copy.

Regretting the inconvenience that you have undoubtedly been caused, we are

Very truly yours,

The addressee gained a distinctly unfavorable impression of this publishing house from the letter, which somewhat overdoes its attempt to impress the reader with the depth of sorrow the house feels for the inconvenience he has "undoubtedly been caused." When one considers that this letter was about three times as long as necessary and had a weeping tone, and that the addressee must read it carefully in order to find out when his book will arrive, or whether it will arrive at all, it is a safe forecast that any advertising literature sent from that publishing house to this man—in the near future, at least—will be burdened with a handicap hard to overcome.

7. *Right kind of letter.*—From the addressee's point of view the following letter would have been more effective for, judging by his letter, the customer was obviously a good business man:

Dear Sir:

Your copy of Rider's "Freedom" ought to reach you in a day or so. The fact that this book was temporarily out of stock caused the delay, which we regret. Your orders will always receive prompt attention.

We hope this delay has not caused you much inconvenience.

Yours very truly,

This letter tells first what the reader most wants to know, and then explains the cause of the delay. It gives the impression, in a straightforward way, that the writer genuinely regrets any inconvenience which the delay may have caused. This letter, moreover, in-

cludes one sentence that shows exceptionally good salesmanship, without any suggestion of apology: "Your orders will always receive prompt attention." That is the correspondent's way of telling the reader that his order was filled as promptly as possible, and at the same time it carries assurance that future orders will have prompt attention.

8. *Risk in following rules.*—Why did the writer of the longer letter quoted in the preceding section mention his former letter notwithstanding the fact that its mention would only serve to cause the reader to remember that it had given him a false impression of the time when the book would arrive? Also, why did he mention the date of the letters to which his letter is a reply? He was under the impression that it is always necessary to refer to the date of all letters directly connected with the subject matter of any letter that is written. He read that rule somewhere. Therefore it was his custom *always* to mention at the beginning of a letter the dates or numbers of any preceding letters. But in this case it was not necessary to remind the addressee that he had been put to the trouble of writing a follow-up on his order.

Thus, it may be not only unnecessary but also unwise to mention the date of the letter to which a reply is being written. But the main point here is that rules in writing letters nearly always have many exceptions. If the writer carefully considers the effect that his

letter might have on the reader, he is able to judge readily enough whether or not it is best to mention the date of previous correspondence. About the only iron-clad rule is that the correspondent should always strive to appreciate fully the reader's point of view.

9. *Letters of inquiry, and answers.*—Every concern receives a great many inquiries and requests which have no direct connection with sales. Nevertheless it pays, as a rule, to answer this kind of mail with the same careful attention that is given to inquiries for catalogs and price quotations. Often letters of inquiry are incomplete, so that it is impossible to give the information wanted before a number of letters have been exchanged. Under such circumstances the correspondent is sometimes tempted to allow his feeling of annoyance to become evident in his letters. This is not good salesmanship, as the case given below illustrates.

A country merchant wrote the following letter to two general wholesale houses with which he was doing business:

Gentlemen:

I want a good file for my letters and catalogs. Please tell me what would be the best kind and where I can get it.

Hoping to hear from you soon, and thanking you for the information, I am

Yours truly,

From one wholesale house he received the following reply:

Dear Sir:

We have your letter of January 30th in which you ask what kind of a file for letters would be best for your purpose and where you can get it.

You probably did not notice that we sell a letter-file, which is described on page 260 in our general catalog. If this does not happen to be the kind you want, however, please tell us more definitely just what you want and we shall be glad to advise you where you can find it.

One advantage of the small file we sell is that your correspondence is easily classified and arranged, and you can add to its capacity as needed. We always recommend this unit system. Its cost is nominal as compared to the big wooden or steel vertical files.

It will be a pleasure to supply you with any quantity of these files which your needs require.

Yours very truly,

From the other wholesale house he received this letter:

Dear Sir:—

In response to your request of January 30th, we take pleasure in sending you the inclosed literature, which gives full details concerning what we believe to be the best of modern filing cabinets for letters, catalogs, booklets, and so on, for a store as big as yours.

Mr. Brady tells us that he knows several merchants who find these big vertical files satisfactory. Some are made of wood, others of steel, offering protection against fire. Several other companies make a similar file, but Mr. Cowans, who buys all our own office furniture, tells me he can do best with this company.

In case you should want a smaller file, we would supply it. The inclosed clipping from our catalog describes the file we carry.

I hope this information is what you want. If not, let us know and we'll be glad to be of further service.

Yours very truly,

10. *Comparison of these letters.*—Both of the writers of the above letters had an equally good opportunity to write an effective letter. Both letters are mechanically faultless. But it is obvious that one of them—the one last quoted—is far ahead of the other in point of effectiveness. The merchant gained a distinctly favorable impression of the house that sent him this letter, and an unfavorable impression of the other house, partly because he was able to see the contrast between them, since he received the two letters on the same day.

The writer of the first letter made the mistake of failing to anticipate the fact that this merchant might have written elsewhere for the same information at the same time, and that consequently his letter would have to compete with other letters for the merchant's patronage and good-will.

The writer of the first letter above quoted was really glad that the merchant's letter was indefinite. It gave him the chance to boost sales by recommending the file sold by his own house. At first thought on reading the letter of inquiry, he probably said to himself, "Another Podunk merchant who thinks the big house in the big city is a mind-reader." He was about to dictate a polite letter requesting more definite information when he got the "selling idea," which he embodied in his letter. Therefore, he thought, it was better not to cause the merchant to think too definitely concerning the kind of file he wanted. He would write a selling letter, the kind of letter that the

big men in the front office would write. He congratulated himself on his ability to see a lead for a sale. He hoped that the sales manager would happen to read the letter. He ought to be in the sales department, anyway.

What was the trouble with this correspondent? Fundamentally he lacked sound selling sense—he was not keenly alive to all the indirect as well as the direct influence on sales. He did not at all put himself in the place of the merchant to whom he was writing, or he would have foreseen the unsatisfactory effect of his letter. He was blindly following the theory, as he understood it, that every letter is a sales letter. The trouble was not with the theory, but with his conception of what constitutes a sales letter. He was too eager to *sell* something, and not sufficiently eager to render a *service* of the sort that leads to sales in the future. This correspondent showed lack of foresight as well as insight in his application of the fundamental selling principle involved in the word "service."

11. *To please most or to displease least.*—The answer to inquiries and requests can generally be summed up by either "yes" or "no." As a rule, the writer either can or cannot give the service requested. A practical idea for improving letters of this type is that of trying to please the reader as much as possible when the answer is "yes," and to displease him as little as possible when the answer is "no." The last letter quoted in Section 9 shows an attempt to please the reader as much as possible.

The writer of that letter might have referred his addressee to the concern which sells the kind of filing cabinet he recommended; or he might have given the names of several concerns which sell filing cabinets; but in either case he would have made a mistake, with good intentions, in trying to be of as great service as possible. He might not have mentioned the fact that other merchants find the cabinet which he recommended satisfactory; in short, he might not have risked a definite recommendation of a definite cabinet. But had he not done all of these things his "yes" would not have pleased the addressee as much as it did. His definite recommendation and his reasons for making it saved time and trouble for his addressee, as did the inclosed literature which this concern's buyer happened to have in his files.

It is often difficult not to displease when it is necessary to say "no." For instance, whenever it is impossible to furnish the information that a customer asks for, it is often wise to tell him about whatever effort was made to get the information. Instead of simply saying, "We regret to report our inability to find out where you can get what you want," and let it go at that, it might be better to say, "We searched our files and got in touch with a couple of other concerns by telephone, but could not find out what you want to know."

12. *Writing effective inquiries and requests.*— What kind of inquiry secures the best attention? It is frequently the inquirer's fault when he gets an un-

satisfactory reply to his inquiry. His letter may be incomplete or inaccurate or indefinite, or it may have the wrong tone, or in some other way show lack of consideration for the reader's point of view. Just as much good salesmanship can be shown in a letter of inquiry as in a letter that answers an inquiry. This is true of inquiries concerning prices, goods or services which the writer desires to purchase, as well as of those that have no connection with strictly business matters. Sometimes the buyer has the upper hand because he is able to choose between a number of sellers, and hence he is inclined to write a letter that will show neither courtesy nor diplomacy. But to do this would be poor salesmanship. It is decidedly important to develop the good-will of the seller. In so far as this is true, buying letters are selling letters. Letters of this kind are further treated in the next chapter.

13. *Miscellaneous types of letters.*—There are many other types of routine letters, which cannot be considered here for lack of space, but the same fundamental principles of effectiveness apply to all types. When a letter is sent with a remittance, for instance, it may be written with the idea of giving the recipient a great deal of pleasure in getting the payment, and of influencing him to feel very well disposed toward the writer and his house; or if the writer does not definitely try to do this, the letter may be such that the addressee will be positively displeased and will harbor a feeling of ill-will toward the writer and his house.

No matter how little direct influence on sales a letter may have—whether it be a letter in answer to a casual inquiry from a correspondent with whom, in all probability, no business dealings will ever be carried on, or even a request that a railroad trace some shipment—it offers opportunity to exercise good selling sense in its composition, and to create good-will toward the writer and his firm. The writer should always aim to create a *maximum* quantity of good-will; to please as much as possible if he is sending a "yes" message; to displease as little as possible if he is obliged to say "no." Few, if any, letters are so "routine" in nature that they cannot be handled in such a way as to make them *positive* builders of good-will. The habit of writing *individual* letters saturated with good salesmanship keeps the writer's thought and expression fresh, makes his work interesting, and is the cause of his writing effective letters.

REVIEW

What is the most practical basis for the classification of incoming mail?

What is meant by the statement, "There really are no 'routine' letters"?

Why does the acquirement of freshness of thought and expression present a real problem? How can one best solve this problem?

What is the connection between order correspondence and sales?

Mention important considerations to be borne in mind in answering letters of inquiry.

Why is it always good policy to please as much as possible or to displease as little as possible, as the case may be?

What are the requirements in writing an effective inquiry?

CHAPTER VIII

TYPES OF LETTERS (*Continued*)

1. *Difficult types of letters.*—Letters might also be classified according to the degree of skill required to make them effective. Much executive and official correspondence must be skilfully handled. A great deal of credit and collection correspondence is difficult. There are many cases in each one of the various types of correspondence that are difficult to handle. It would be incorrect to say that certain types of letters are difficult while other types are easy, except in a general way. But there are types of letters, such as those considered in this chapter, which require, *on the average,* greater selling skill and good judgment than other types—for example, letters concerning delayed shipments.

2. *One solution of this problem.*—In 1914, the general manager of a large western wholesale house came to the conclusion that too many of the "ticklish" cases were not well handled by his correspondents. He found that many letters which it would not be easy even for him to answer satisfactorily were placed in the hands of young correspondents whose services were worth about $25 a week. He had a choice of two possible methods to improve matters. One was to train

correspondents to handle the more difficult letters as well as those easy to handle; the other was to devise some plan whereby it would be possible to give all difficult cases only to competent correspondents.

He frankly asked each correspondent in the house for his opinion of the best solution of the problem. It was evident from the suggestions that came to him that the men believed that the plan of having high-priced specialists for difficult cases would not be as effective as to train all correspondents so that, if possible, each would acquire the ability to handle difficult cases. It was agreed that those correspondents who could not develop this ability should be transferred to other work, or allowed to go elsewhere if they insisted on continuing in that kind of work. The adoption of this plan resulted naturally in the development of a thoro system of training which solved the problem.

If a correspondent is unable to handle difficult cases, he will not recognize them when they arise; and what is more important, if he is unskilled in handling "ticklish" cases, he cannot handle *efficiently* cases that are "easy." The task of making the simple letters effective from a selling standpoint is often difficult. In fact, the simpler the letter and the smaller the direct influence it exerts on sales, the more difficult it is, as a rule, to write effectively from the standpoint of good salesmanship. Therefore, the plan of having only expert correspondents in an organization would seem to be good policy.

3. *Executive correspondence.*—Of all difficult letters the most difficult is the executive's letter which adversely criticises the work of a subordinate or refuses a request, and yet does not cause the subordinate to entertain ill-will toward the executive. The application of the most subtle principles of good salesmanship is usually required in this kind of correspondence.

A good illustration of this kind of letter is the following, written by Abraham Lincoln to General McClellan, whose plans for conducting his campaign in the Civil War did not accord with Lincoln's ideas. The example makes it clear that the fundamental principles of effective business correspondence are the same, whether the writer is President of the United States or General Manager of the Standard Steel Works of Pittsburgh. Lincoln wrote as follows from Washington to General McClellan February 3, 1862:

My dear Sir:

You and I have distinct and different plans for a movement of the Army of the Potomac—yours to be down the Chesapeake, up the Rappahannock to Urbana and across land to the terminus of the railroad on the York River; mine to move directly to a point on the railroad southwest of Manassas.

If you will give me satisfactory answers to the following questions, I shall gladly yield my plan to yours.

First. Does not your plan involve a greatly larger expenditure of time and money than mine?

Second. Wherein is a victory more certain by your plan than mine?

Third. Wherein is a victory more valuable by your plan than mine?

Fourth. In fact, would it not be less valuable in this, that it would break no great line of the enemy's communications, while mine would?

Fifth. In case of disaster, would not a retreat be more difficult by your plan than mine?

Sixth. Are you strong enough—are you strong enough, even with my help—to set your foot upon the necks of Sumner, Heintzelman and Keyes, all at once? This is a practical and very serious question for you.

This letter carries valuable suggestions as to how the modern sales manager of salesmen should write when he finds that the plans of one of his men are not in accord with his own. The admirable directness of the first clear and terse statement of fact; the extremely fair and reasonable spirit in the second paragraph; then those point-blank questions which put the reader on the defensive and prevented him from dodging—after he had been persuaded to give consideration to the greater feasibility of the writer's plans—such a letter merits the envy of any modern manager of men.

4. *Writing instructions to employes.*—An important part of executive correspondence is the preparation of instructions to employes. The executive must sell his employes on the idea that they ought to carry out his instructions with enthusiastic willingness and carefulness. From the standpoint of effectiveness, compare the following two communications.

I

Dear Sir:—Your vacation period has been fixed for the two weeks ending September 9. Please arrange work accordingly.

(Signed) ————————.

II

Dear Mr. Bigler:

It gives me pleasure to assign for your annual vacation the two weeks beginning August 27th. Please shape up your work so that we won't miss you any more than necessary, and so that you can entirely forget us while you are away.

Kindly take this letter to Mr. Jamison on August 26th, and he will give you two weeks' pay in advance.

Two distinctly different tones are discernible in these letters. To decide on the relative effectiveness of the two, then, would probably involve a comparison of the relative merits of two types of management. Apart from this consideration, the second seems to be by far the better. These letters were used by the president of a big corporation—a man who believes as much in training his $5,000 men as in training his $2,000 men—as illustrations of a poor notification and a good one, respectively. He said that the first was incomplete and ineffective because it was written from the wrong point of view. His opinion is given in the following quotation:

If you are giving some one something, make the most of it. That short note is little more than a snarl. Growl at an employe and he growls back in spirit, if not actually. This business has been built on sound principles of salesmanship.

We get good work, from contented employes, by according them the same kind of treatment that we give our customers. We put as much good salesmanship, therefore, into writing a simple instruction to our fellow employes, as we put into our sales letters.

He followed this statement by pointing out definitely the difference between these two messages. He dwelt a long time on the good tone of the second, and emphasized the fact that the writer's attitude toward his reader must be correct, that words alone do not make an announcement or message of instruction effective. He called attention to the impression upon the reader, and showed that it differs according to whether particular mention is made of the beginning or of the ending of the vacation period. If the firm emphasizes the latter, it will appear selfish. He pointed out how the second letter would cause the reader to be as much pleased as possible, and how necessary it is to say something which shall cause him to prepare as well as possible to lessen the inconvenience of his absence—"for his own sake" as well as for that of the management.

The same essential principles apply in the writing of all kinds of instructions. Naturalness is the characteristic which is most often lacking. Instructions, too often, are so concise, abrupt and imperative that they invite a resistance which would be avoided by the application of a little good selling sense.

5. *Interdepartmental and intercompany correspondence.*—Few large houses in which the volume of

interdepartmental and intercompany correspondence is heavy give as much attention to it as to correspondence with customers and outside concerns. But why not? Consideration of the point of view of the addressee is as necessary in gaining effectiveness in this kind of correspondence as in correspondence with outsiders. There is no essential difference involved. As a means of improving the effectiveness of the cooperation within an organization, interdepartmental correspondence is invaluable; its importance, therefore, should not be underestimated.

A big company might have an elaborate set of instructions and suggestions, in the form of a manual, for interhouse and interdepartmental correspondence. This manual would serve a valuable end, for it would furnish an excellent means by which the management could present its ideas on effective cooperation, laying emphasis on the necessity of such cooperation and its value to the house and to all employes, "who are the house," as is sometimes said. Among the more fundamental suggestions of such a book would be:

If a memorandum to a fellow-member in this organization is worth writing at all, it is worth careful attention—just as careful as tho you were writing to an outside concern on whom we are dependent for business. Please mark this: We are just as much dependent for business on the way in which we cooperate among ourselves as on the way in which we cooperate with customers. You can readily see the connection between internal cooperation and service to customers. One of the most important means of effective internal cooperation is carefulness in all written and spoken communications with *all* other members of this organization.

Therefore, in our written or spoken messages, it is best for us always to

know definitely just what we want to say before we say it;

make clear what we want to tell the other fellow, so that he will get it with the least possible effort on his part.

Show the right spirit—the businesslike attitude, not letting close, personal acquaintance with the addressee cause us to "get familiar" with him. Business is business. Don't mix social chatter with business.

Remember that good business is good salesmanship; and that good salesmanship is always considerate of the other man's feelings; that it cannot afford to hold grudges; that broad human sympathy—not sentiment, but intelligent sympathy of the sort you find in a good salesman—is what gets cooperation from the other fellow; that success in getting others to cooperate with you measures the thickness of your pay envelop.

Write to the point; use clear, direct, definite, simple English; put yourself in your reader's place. How would what you say affect you if you were the other fellow? Keep that question in mind. In short, make each interdepartment or interhouse letter a sales letter.

These instructions are suggestions. They are not meant to be complete. Many of us are observing all of them. But there is always room for improvement in making written or spoken communications more effective. We all are sized up by what we say as well as by what we do.

6. *Formal instructions.*—Thus, the essential principles upon which other kinds of business correspondence depend for effectiveness apply also in writing any kind of message to fellow-employes. They apply to the subordinate's communications to his superior officers and to the executive's letters to men under him. In each case a mistake is commonly made. On the one hand, the subordinate too often kowtows to

his superior; the executive, on the other hand, not infrequently shows condescension toward his employes. In the first case the employe gives an undesirable impression of weakness; and in the other, the executive assumes an attitude of superiority which hurts his influence with the employes.

7. *Buying letters that sell.*—Many good buyers do not appreciate the fact that they are writers of selling letters of the most difficult type—letters that sell good-will, which secures the best price and the best service in all cases in which the buyer is at all dependent on the seller.

Whether or not the buyer shows the selling attitude in his relations with his supply house, is revealed in the letters he writes as much as in his personal interviews with salesmen. Perhaps he does not *need* to be so diplomatic and considerate as the advertising or sales manager. But it often pays him to write letters that will serve his future interests well. For instance, when all the bids are in and the contract is awarded to one firm, he may write a diplomatic letter to all the other firms stating who received the order and why it was given to that concern, if they do not already know. Such information might help them to figure better the next time they are asked to make an estimate; and such a letter gives the unsuccessful bidders an impression of fairness which it is worth while to convey.

The same fundamental rules for effectiveness apply in buying correspondence as in sales correspondence,

altho in each case the emphasis is differently placed. The necessity for definiteness and clearness, for example, often requires the buyer to make it a rule not to use abbreviations or shortened expressions of any sort whatsoever, because they are liable to be misleading. The buyer who writes with his addressee's point of view in mind concerning supplies and prices is likely to secure the prompt and careful attention he wants. Even when a house wants a buyer's business the order department often resents the tone of the buyer's letters, so that poor service is an inevitable result. The conducting of efficient buying correspondence is a highly specialized art which has not received the attention it deserves.

8. *Essential considerations in buying letters.*—A signed order is a legal contract. Therefore it is wise for the buyer to make sure that there are included in the order all provisions for his entire satisfaction, such as arrangements for time and means of shipment, terms of payment, guaranty of service, and so on, as well as complete and exact specifications of what is wanted. As a rule, printed order sheets are enough for all essential details, but often it is advisable for the buyer to write a letter in order to emphasize the importance of his receiving the kind of service that the contract calls for.

The chief point is that an order *when accepted* becomes a legal contract. A realization of this fact is usually sufficient to cause a buyer to make sure that his written order is complete, but it certainly should

not prevent him from making his letter "human," even when it is necessary to use a great many technical terms. A few idiomatic expressions sprinkled in, here and there, tend to lessen any severity in the conditions he assigns in placing his order; they help him to gain prompt acceptance of his order and willing service.

In fact, the most difficult task of writing an effective buying letter is to make it complete and thoro without causing offense. It is important to include some "human touches." For example, consider the following letter, written from the addressee's point of view:

Gentlemen:

The special order inclosed (No. 846) is all for merchandise to be used in our big 50th Anniversary Sale, which begins on March 31st. Therefore, in case you can't ship all these items so that they will reach us before that date, please let us know not later than the 5th of this month.

Yours very truly,

The order blank used in placing this order included spaces for all essential information. In general, it is wise not to send a letter with an order unless it is necessary, but it is extremely important to be sure whether or not it is necessary. The special point to be noted here is that the letter quoted above is human. Contrast it with this:

Gentlemen:

Order #846, inclosed, is not valid unless goods reach us not later than March 31st. Unless we have guaranty of

arrival by that date on or before March 5th, will place order elsewhere.

Yours truly,

There is not much question as to which of these letters best serves the interests of the writer. One is human, the other severe. One *leads;* the other *drives.* One is a selling letter; the other is too nearly a demand.

9. *Letters that follow up orders.*—Frequently shipments are delayed and it is necessary to write a letter designed to hurry the filling of the order. The purpose of such a letter is to secure immediate action on the part of the seller and to get definite information, if possible, as to when the order will be shipped.

When cancelation would be legal according to the agreement embodied in the order, and would not greatly inconvenience the buyer, it is allowable to state in the letter that the order will be canceled unless shipment can be made on or before a specified date. Usually this statement will secure the desired action if the letter is written in accordance with principles of good salesmanship. There should not, of course, be the least suggestion of a threat. But if cancelation would work even a greater hardship on the buyer than on the seller, it requires considerable skill to handle the situation. Under such circumstances, a buyer too often writes an ineffective letter in which he nags the seller, claims that he has been wronged, or weakly pleads for early shipment. In other words he takes

the wrong attitude and consequently fails to produce the desired effect upon the addressee.

The following letter is a good example of this type. It failed to get results.

Dear Sir:

Your salesman promised delivery of our order #6897 by October 10th at the latest but his word does not seem to be good. Here it is the 20th and the shipment hasn't even started yet, so far as we know. If we had known that your promises are worthless we would have ordered elsewhere. But it's too late now for that. We are losing money by the delay. Please get busy, won't you, and get the shipment on its way. When will it be here? Why is it delayed?

Yours truly,

That letter starts defiantly and ends pleadingly. The following example is in strong contrast; it secured satisfactory results in a similar case:

Dear Sir:

Our special order of September 10th, #4774, should have reached us five days ago. Something exceptional must be holding it up, for we had an explicit agreement concerning the date of delivery. Please look this shipment up and let us know by return mail, if possible, how soon you can send it.

Yours very truly,

This letter makes a plain, straightforward request. It is notable for the fact that the writer has entirely avoided the strong temptation to heap accusations on some young correspondent in the order department who was not responsible for the delay, and who feels that his concern is doing the very best it can under the circumstances. The salesmanship in this second let-

ter is evident chiefly in its restraint. Courteous firmness is the dominant tone.

10. *Contract letters.*—There are many other types of letters that are comparatively difficult to write, such as some credit and collection letters and adjustment letters. There is much technical correspondence, too, which is difficult because the writer very often has either much greater or much less technical knowledge of the subject than the reader. Much government official correspondence of the more formal sort is also difficult. The principles presented in preceding chapters apply to all these types, for there is not much, if any, fundamental difference between the various kinds of difficult correspondence. If the writer's selling sense is properly developed he can handle effectively almost any kind of difficult case, provided he has sufficient information concerning conditions and facts to enable him to know his addressee's point of view.

One type of letter that requires special information, however, is the contract letter. It is well to know, for instance, that when A makes an offer to B by letter, B's letter of acceptance completes the contract as soon as it is mailed. If, however, B sends his acceptance by messenger, by telegraph or by other means than that used by A in making his offer, the contract is not complete until A *receives* the acceptance. Also, a revocation of an offer must be received before the contract has been completed, in order to be effective. The right to revoke acceptance by telegram before a letter of acceptance is received may be

reserved if this is stated in the letter as a condition of acceptance. Offers must be accepted within a "reasonable time" after they are received, but it is usually advisable to attach a time limit to offers made by letter. Telegraphic offers should be accepted by telegram the same day they are received.

It is also important for a correspondent to possess a knowledge of libel laws. Defamatory statements, especially those that are damaging to the reputation of an individual, have no place in business correspondence. They become *published* libel when a third party reads the letter that contains them. The correspondent should bear this in mind when answering requests for credit information. While such communications are privileged, and are not libelous even if untrue, the privilege is lost if malice can be shown. It is dangerous to make a positive statement that some one is not worthy of credit.

Apart from legal knowledge of this kind, accuracy of statement is important in letters of contract. In this connection, clearness, the rhetorical quality of greatest significance in business English, is a prime requisite. It was considered in Chapter IV, Section 5, and is again treated in Chapter XVII.

11. *Telegrams, cablegrams and wireless messages.* —A large proportion of all telegrams transmitted lack completeness and accuracy. This is explainable largely by the fact that in a great many cases the writer of a telegram is working under high emotional pressure, and, in his haste, fails to give the composition

of the message deliberate consideration. But very often the more urgent his message, the more time should be given to its composition. Sometimes, on the other hand, the writer will labor long and hard over his message in the belief that brevity is the chief virtue in a telegram, and will eventually send a communication so brief as to be unintelligible.

As a rule, the sole purpose of a telegram, a cablegram or a wireless message is to convey definite information clearly. To include all necessary words is as important as to omit all unnecessary words. To know *definitely* what you want to say before you attempt to say it in less than ten words, is the first requirement, and the next is to say it naturally with short words and short sentences, just as briefly as possible. The third step is to eliminate unnecessary words and to have the reader's point of view always in mind, remembering that a telegram is not a contest in condensation, but a *message* to some one who might not be skilful enough to follow the guide posts accurately. This method has been found good in practice. Some men do best, if the message is a difficult one, by writing and then rewriting it again and again. But if the message is to be made complete, it is safer to use the other method just explained.

What is said about writing effective telegrams applies to cablegrams and wireless messages, except that in the latter case the higher cost makes brevity more desirable. Code and cipher systems, however, are de-

signed to make it possible to send messages of adequate length at a reasonable price.

It is well to remember that the telegraph companies do not contract to write punctuation marks, unless they are spelled out; therefore the words in the longer as well as in the shorter messages should be so arranged that punctuation will be unnecessary. It is also well to remember that plain facts can be better stated with short Anglo-Saxon words than with longer words, which are more fittingly used in conveying complex thought. Furthermore, long words are more likely to be misunderstood by the operator, and consequently misspelt. It is good practice to use short words and few.

In addition to general information of this kind, the writer of a telegram should know the technic of the art. For instance, spelling out all numerals saves expense, for each figure is counted as one word. "Fifteen" is charged for, of course, as one word, but "15" counts as two. Furthermore, numbers spelled out are more accurately transmitted than if written in figures. The correspondent should know also that a compound word counts as one word; that there are many kinds of telegrams—that day letters, for example, may or may not be delivered the same day they are sent; that each of the more common business abbreviations may as a rule be written so that it will be counted as one word—for example, C.O.D. and C.I.F. may be written often as cod and cif; and that code words which can be pronounced readily are per-

missible in telegrams, but not in day letters. Telegraph companies supply information of this kind.

REVIEW

What problem in the management of correspondence arises from the fact that all types of letters include some cases which are easy and others which are difficult to handle?

Why should serious attention be given to interdepartmental and intercompany correspondence?

What are the essential considerations in the conducting of buying correspondence?

What kind of letter is most likely to hurry up a shipment?

What constitutes a good telegram? What is the best way to write one?

CHAPTER IX

ADJUSTMENT LETTERS

1. *Adjustment letters and salesmanship.*—Adjustment letters are closely connected with sales. In fact, their influence on sales is sometimes of greater weight than that of direct selling letters, for it is usually more desirable to keep the patronage of old customers and have them satisfied than to get new customers. The *active* ill-will of patrons who are dissatisfied with goods or services is the price of the failure to make satisfactory adjustments of complaints.

Therefore adjustment letters are really sales letters, and they are sales letters that are difficult to write. Even when a fixed and liberal policy of adjustment is the practice, it is not easy to write a letter which will grant the claim and satisfy the customer so thoroly as to increase his good-will toward the house. And yet this is the requirement that all adjustment letters must meet to be effective. This desirable result is most difficult to attain when it is unwise to make an adjustment which would free the claimant from all his loss as he figures it.

It is often the business of the correspondent who answers a complaint not only to make an adjustment which will be deemed satisfactory by the claimant, but

also to resell him on his confidence in the reliability of the goods or the service. If an automobile tire, for instance, does not give satisfactory service and it is necessary to supply a new tire, it is reasonable to believe that the customer will not be as confident of good service from the second tire as he was about the first—even if it is supplied entirely free of charge—unless the letter of adjustment includes information of the sort that tends to restore confidence in this brand of goods, as does the letter quoted in Section 8 of this chapter.

Owing to these and many other conditions, adjustment letters are among the most difficult that a correspondent has to write. The difficulty arises from the facts that the addressee's attitude is in most cases unfavorable with respect to his relations with the writer; that his conception of justice may be unreasonable; and that the final adjustment of the case may fall short of his expectations. To give a disgruntled claimant less than he asks for, and at the same time to cause him to feel completely satisfied, always requires the exercise of the best salesmanship.

2. *The right attitude.*—To have the right attitude toward the addressee is a requirement which applies with exceptional force to adjustment letters, since so many letters of complaint are of the kind that tend to arouse the reader's antagonism. It is not always easy to maintain an even temper toward a person who makes accusations and claims which are clearly unjust, especially when he uses vituperative language.

But even if the claimant heaps insult on the house and its products, in writing an effective adjustment letter the correspondent, as a rule—not necessarily in all cases—will ignore that part of the complaint letter which arouses resentment. If he is going to do his best work, he cannot afford to let emotion interfere with his judgment.

The successful adjustment man will, however, take note of every point in the claim letter that tends to indicate definitely what is the exact caliber of the claimant, and what his frame of mind was when he wrote. In fact, he prefers a complaint letter which frankly reveals the true feelings of the writer to one in which the degree of disappointment is carefully concealed. He knows that the bark of savage complaint letters in most cases indicates lack of inclination to bite, that often those who complain most vociferously are most easily appeased. He feels sure, therefore, that the situation is not nearly so serious as the tone of the letter would seem to indicate. The expert adjustment correspondent fears most the complaint letter that shows courteous restraint, for he knows that often those who say the least will be most likely to cut off their purchases silently, but swiftly and surely, if they are dissatisfied.

3. *It pays to welcome all complaints.*—Whatever the nature of the complaint may be, there are a few general requirements, with respect to the attitude of the adjuster, which apply in all cases. The first is that all complaint letters ought to be *sincerely* wel-

comed, for two main reasons: (1) courteous attention given to complaint matters goes far toward *keeping* customers satisfied; and (2) to the firm that is alert and has the right attitude, complaints furnish valuable suggestions in regard to the improvement of the products and the service. If a concern assumes the right attitude, there is every probability that the number of complaints will decrease as time goes on. "Encourage complaints so that fewer of them will be made," is as paradoxical as "Make money by losing it," when liberal adjustments are made for the sake of future business. But both policies are sound.

The welcoming of complaints, therefore, does not necessarily mean undue liberality in adjusting the trouble. But it is true that the man who complains about unsatisfactory goods or services is doing a favor to the one to whom he complains. The number of cases in which the complainant deliberately makes a false claim are so few in the experience of most houses that they can be entirely ignored in establishing fundamental adjustment policies. And the foundation of any proper policy is the right attitude toward claims and complaints—the attitude which convinces the claimant that the firm is actually thankful that he took the time and trouble to help the company to keep him as a satisfied customer, and to help the house to improve its service to all other customers.

4. *Other requirements.*—Perhaps the most difficult requirement is to keep the adjustment letter free from resentment. This does not mean that it is never

wise to call the attention of a claimant to the fact that his remarks are not just, but it does mean that if this must be done the statement should be made in an impersonal way, and often with the implication that the firm feels that the claimant really does not mean all he says. Even when the complainant is abusive and does mean all he says, it is the adjustment correspondent's duty to entertain sympathetic personal interest. He should consider the lack of sound business training that his addressee's letter shows, and accordingly should write him with toleration a *business* letter—and business letters are always courteous.

5. *What constitutes true courtesy?*—At this point it might be well to point out again the danger of misinterpreting rules. For instance, the important rule that business letters should always be courteous is often mistaken to mean that all business letters ought to contain smoothly polite phraseology. We have all received letters that are too evidently courteous. For instance, in replying to a particularly bitter complaint letter, the correspondent too often makes his letter *obviously* courteous in his effort not to allow the claimant to discern any show of resentment. An obviously courteous letter under such circumstances is likely to defeat its own end and to inflame anew the claimant's anger. The complainant's feeling under such circumstances is similar to that which the street Arab entertains for the refined language of the well-bred lad when a quarrel is brewing between them. The well-bred boy would find unrefined talk

more effective in such a case, unless, for strategic reasons, he wanted to make his antagonist blindly mad.

It often pays, in the case of an angry claimant, to state facts plainly, without using a too polite phraseology. The following letters illustrate this point:

Dear Sir:

Your people are the limit. That last shipment contained two tubs of No. 14 candy that was all wormy, and besides, the shipment reached here two weeks later than promised. I am sending back the rotten stuff, and don't trouble yourself to write me one of those salvy letters of explanation. I want service, not letters, and intend to buy only where I can get it.

Yours truly,

This letter happened to express a feeling that many complainants entertain toward "salvy" adjustment letters—evident attempts to soothe ruffled feelings. It is very clear in this case that an obviously courteous reply would be most ineffective. But whether or not this man had said, "Don't trouble yourself to write me one of those salvy letters of explanation," the correspondent would have handled the case just about as he did. His letter follows. It explains without seeming to.

Dear Sir:

Your letter of September 30th makes my blood boil against the railroad which, by mistake, kept those two tubs of candy shut up in a hot box-car two weeks longer than they should have. It is not the loss of the candy that we regret—the railroad will make good on that—but the railroad can't get us another account to take the place of yours. It is tough when we have to suffer for the mistakes of others.

If you will immediately wire us collect "ship two tubs, number fourteen, by express," we will start the goods to you by express, prepaid, within a half-hour after the telegram reaches us.

Yours very truly,

6. *Over-anxiety to please.*—This letter secured the desired telegram, followed by a letter of apology. One proof of the good salesmanship in it is the fact that no direct request was made that the complainant change his mind about buying elsewhere. The correspondent lets the reader draw his own conclusions concerning who was responsible for the trouble. He shows toward the railroad a natural resentment which this addressee can readily understand, and then takes the opportunity to make a subtle appeal to the reader's pride by giving the impression that the concern would consider the loss of this particular account a serious matter. Yet the writer avoids the common mistake of seeming to be over-anxious to please an angry complainant.

This mistake, also, results from a too rigid application of a good principle, or rule: the advisability of gaining as much good-will as possible out of an adjustment. The reply to the following letter illustrates the failure to do this. The writer makes the mistake of using too many very courteous phrases, the purpose being altogether too obvious to the traveling salesman to whom the letter was sent. The addressee would have received an impression of greater sincerity if the correspondent had written in a less suave and ingratiating tone.

The complainant's letter follows:

Gentlemen:

I know a big concern like yours gets behind its merchandise with a guaranty of satisfaction. Therefore I am returning the inclosed tie, which I bought in your 14th Street store. I have worn it five or six times. The price was one dollar.

I am a traveling man but hit New York frequently and like to buy in one of your stores. But this tie is a disappointment. Send me another one about like it, if you will, but one that won't fray out right away.

Yours very truly,

The tie was badly worn at the edges and altho there was not much question that the material was defective, it was possible that the edges might have been scorched in pressing.

Here is the adjustment letter:

Dear Sir:

Please accept our thanks for your very kind and courteous favor of the 30th, directing our attention to the unsatisfactory service given you by a tie purchased at one of our stores. Rest assured that we are prepared to stand back of our merchandise under any and all circumstances. Furthermore our one great desire is to have every customer thoroly satisfied.

We take great pleasure in inclosing herewith a new tie to replace the one you returned, and trust that it will give you a great deal more satisfactory service than the one you returned. If it should not, do not hesitate to return this one too.

Yours very truly,

In spite of the fact that the adjustment of the complaint was entirely satisfactory, this letter distinctly

impressed the addressee with a feeling that the writer did not mean all that he said. He seemed to be too anxious to please. Furthermore, the correspondent neglected to create confidence in the new tie. Here is the letter rewritten with the object of creating this belief in the firm.

Dear Sir:

Thank you for returning to us the unsatisfactory tie. The purest silk will sometimes fray out easily; or it might be that this tie was scorched when it was pressed. We regret that you happened to get this particular tie. But we are glad you took the trouble to send it back and gave us this opportunity to send you another tie, which, we trust, will give you entire satisfaction.

Please remember that this company stands back of its merchandise with an unqualified guaranty of entire satisfaction, including ties made of pure silk.

Yours very truly,

The writer, in this case, avoids the mistake of showing too much anxiety to say what will please the reader. He resells the customer on confidence in this particular tie, and yet leaves a loophole in case this tie, too, fails to give satisfaction. The mention of the fact that it is made of the purest silk not only serves as a selling point in reestablishing the customer's confidence in the goods, but also influences the customer to be somewhat more careful in handling the second tie.

7. *Should an adjustment letter be long?*—Incidentally the two adjustment letters in the preceding section also illustrate another principle which is often

misapplied, namely, that adjustment letters ought to be long rather than brief. All that is said in the first letter might better be stated in one-half the space, and many of the statements might better be omitted altogether. The length of the adjustment letter, as that of all other letters, depends on what information it is necessary to impart in order to make the impression desired. Piling up courteously phrased sentences that really say nothing is a poor means of being diplomatic and tactful. There is an important difference between letters that are long because they contain many facts which aid directly in gaining the result desired, and letters that are long either because too many words are used to express comparatively few facts, or because facts are included that do not help at all to make the desired impressions.

The reason successful adjustment letters are frequently somewhat long is that it is necessary to make sure not only that the customer is completely satisfied with the adjustment, but also, as already emphasized, it is essential that the addressee receive such an impression of the firm that he will want to continue to deal with them. Also, when the trouble is caused by the customer's misuse of the product or service about which he complains, the presentation of "educational" information that will prevent future trouble often requires considerable space, for such information must usually be imparted in detail.

8. *An "educational" adjustment letter.*—The following letter is designed not only to prevent future

trouble with the addressee, but also to prove to the latter's satisfaction that the allowance which the house has made is just, in view of the fact that the addressee himself was largely responsible for the trouble. This letter is *necessarily* long.

Dear Sir:

After examining your two 37x4 casings mentioned in your letter of March 24, we can appreciate that the mileage you received from them was somewhat disappointing. In order that you may have better results in the future, and avoid further disappointment, let us briefly explain what caused your trouble.

A thoro examination of your casings showed that the fabric on the side walls was separated in spots by insufficient inflation; the tread was cut; loosened and water-soaked by sand blisters and moisture.

Now, an automobile tire will run along uncomplainingly for a while, even if it is not sufficiently inflated, but all the time the inside fabric is undergoing an unnatural bending, and heat is generating. This heat causes the cement between the layers of fabric to melt, and the layers begin slowly to separate. When once they get in this condition they do not work as a unit and chafe one another at every revolution of the tire. Further, a tire not properly inflated is more easily damaged by road bruises, for when the tire contains the right amount of air, shocks are distributed over all parts of it, and the strain at any one point, caused by a bump, is hardly ever sufficient to cause the fabric to break.

To avoid under-inflation in the future, and to be assured that your tires are always pumped up to the proper pressure, we would suggest that you test them every few days with an air-gauge. You can buy a small but reliable gauge for $1.00 from your local dealer, and the tire expense it will save you will pay for it many times.

The water-soaked fabric and tread-loosening are both caused by small snags and cuts in the tread which were al-

lowed to go unrepaired. We would suggest that when these cuts appear in the tread you wash them out thoroly with gasoline and fill them with some good repair-gum. The best time to do this is in the evening, before you put your car away for the night. If this is done the repair-gum placed in the cuts will harden over night and by morning will have become an integral part of the tread.

We are inclosing one of our small service bulletins with certain sections marked with blue pencil, giving explicit instructions how tread bruises and cuts should be repaired.

By following out the above suggestions, you will have no further difficulty with either fabric-separation or tread-loosening, and we are sure that the increased mileage service you obtain will amply compensate you for taking these precautions.

In looking at this proposition from your point of view we can appreciate how you feel, and it is not our idea, in bringing these matters to your attention, to evade whatever responsibility may be ours. However, we found these conditions, and thinking it would be of value to you to know how to prevent a recurrence of your past difficulties, we have offered you the foregoing remedies.

We are going further in this particular instance and are going to assume part of the loss of service caused by these tires giving out prematurely, because our first wish is to satisfy your sense of fairness, and this, better than anything else, explains why we are offering you two new 37x4 plain tread-casings for $24 each, $12 below the regular price.

We have two new casings wrapped and ready to ship, awaiting your instructions.

Yours very truly,

9. *Adjustment should be fair to all concerned.*— The letter just quoted is a good illustration of what constitutes an adjustment which is fair to all concerned, tho the case was one in which it was difficult

for the company to be fair to itself as well as to the customer. Competition is so lively in the rubber business that a firm which is wide awake overlooks no opportunity to increase the good-will of its customers. On the other hand, dissatisfaction, due to the buyer's misuse of the goods, to carelessness and lack of caution, is common. The writing of adjustment letters in this business is exceptionally difficult, unless the company is willing to accept a great deal of loss. In any event, a policy such as that suggested by the well known statement, "The customer is always right," would not be in accordance with a practical definition of a satisfactory adjustment.

This is a nice question of policy: How much of the loss should a company be willing to bear when it is not entirely responsible for the trouble? Of course the answer will depend largely upon how much the company desires the good-will of the complainant. But even when that good-will is greatly desired, it is doubtful whether it is wise for the firm to agree to incur a greater loss than is actually justified by the *facts* in the case, in so far as the facts can be ascertained. On the other hand, it is perhaps advisable in most cases to give the customer the benefit of any doubt.

In general, it might be said that the best adjustment is the one that is the fairest to all parties concerned. Few, if any, business houses can afford to practise absolutely the policy which is based upon the theory that the customer is always right. The spirit

of this theory is admirable and has a significant relation to the kind of service that wins business, but to apply such a theory to all cases, without exception, would often mean unfairness to the customer as well as to the house. For instance, if this theory had been applied in the case just cited, and two new tires had been sent without cost, the addressee might have failed to make use of the educational information that the firm gave him. He might have been less inclined to believe what was said about the cause of his trouble, and undoubtedly would have been much less inclined to respect the house.

Thus, the practice of the policy of fairness to *all* concerned would often make easier the task of writing an effective adjustment letter, altho it would sometimes make the task of adjusting the trouble more difficult. Most people are reasonably fair and, if their demands are unreasonable, are willing to be shown in what the unreasonableness consists.

10. *Building the adjustment letter.*—It is necessary, of course, that each case be handled with due regard for the particular circumstances, but there are a few practical points that will be of value to the correspondent in answering nearly any complaint letter, whether the subject be delayed shipment, goods damaged in transit, defective goods, goods different from those ordered, shortages, lost shipments, or any other kind of claim. Besides these points that have already been presented, the following are important.

It is essential to answer a complaint letter promptly,

and to assure the complainant that his claim is receiving immediate attention. But this is not enough, for, after all, an immediate acknowledgment that gives the complainant nothing but the assurance that his claim has been received and will be adjusted as promptly as possible, is not as effective as a letter that is not sent so promptly, perhaps, but which contains details in regard to the adjustment.

Then, in building the adjustment letter it is, as a rule, best to show at the beginning that the addressee's point of view is appreciated, and to say something which will assure him that he will get a fair adjustment. It is always advisable to show fairness and a determination to satisfy a complainant. In this respect the letter quoted in Section 8 might be improved if, after the first sentence, a statement like this were added: "And it is against our policy to allow any one who uses our tires to be disappointed." This assurance of satisfactory—even stronger and more direct assurance might be given, provided it does not raise the addressee's hopes too high—would make the reader somewhat more willing to read on with strict attention until his big question was finally answered. But he should first be given to understand that under the conditions he cannot, in fairness, expect as liberal an adjustment as he had hoped for.

11. *Classification of adjustment letters.*—The most common classification of adjustment letters is according to the kind of complaint; that is, delayed shipments, defective goods, shortages, and so on. In

each case, it is possible for the house not only to fix the general policy of adjustment, but also to lay down definite instructions in regard to what the contents of the letter shall be. For example, in the case of delay in transit, the letter should give definite information concerning the date, and the method and route of shipment; the correspondent should express regret concerning the delay, and should promise that the firm will immediately give assistance if it is found, after a tracer has been sent, that the shipment has been lost. He should also offer to duplicate the order promptly in such a case, if the customer desires him to do so.

The cause of the trouble largely determines the kind of letter to be written. If, for instance, the cause of the delay in transit happens to be a mistake on the part of the shipping department, and is not due to any negligence on the part of the transportation company, the correspondent should frankly admit the error and explain how it occurred, and if a claim has been made for damages resulting from the delay, should grant it, provided the facts substantiate it. Thus, it is clear that the responsibility for the trouble is another important basis of classification.

Still another important basis for the classification of adjustment letters is the degree of seriousness of the loss to the house or to the customer. In general, it is advisable to give especially careful attention to the more serious cases, altho this policy may be disputed from the theoretical standpoint.

Such classifications in a limited way allow the use of form letters and form paragraphs in the handling of the similar complaints. But comparatively few complaints can safely be answered by means of forms. Most cases are difficult, and these are the kind in which it is necessary to apply skilfully the fundamental principles of effective letter-writing, which are mentioned in the first part of this book.

12. *Simpler classes of adjustment letters.*—Very often the simple cases, which involve no serious trouble, offer an opportunity for skilful work. The following complaint letter, received from a woman by a big mail-order house, and the method of dealing with the complainant, are evidence of this fact.

Dear Sirs:

Last week I received the Oil Stove No. 113, also the groceries. The Oil Stove we do not like. Can you furnish me with a wick-stove like this so I can set it on my cook stove? Please let me know at once how we can exchange. This stove is in just as good shape as when we received it.

Yours truly,

The idea of the firm in answering this letter was to encourage the customer to keep the wickless stove, since they knew that it would prove entirely satisfactory as soon as she became accustomed to it. One correspondent in handling the case wrote as follows:

Dear Madam:

On referring to our records we find that we sell a great many more wickless oil stoves than wick-stoves. The wickless stove that you purchased is one of our best sellers and

one that should give satisfaction to you, as it has to thousands of others.

We, however, do not expect our customers to keep goods with which they are not satisfied, and if you do not want the stove, you may return it to us. For your convenience in doing so we inclose tag and bills of lading.

When you make the shipment you can let us know just how you want this case handled, that is, what stove you want in place of the one you are returning. Your wishes in the matter will have our immediate attention.

Yours very truly,

But that letter was not sent. It was held up by an older correspondent who was responsible for training the young man who wrote it. The older correspondent suggested the following letter:

Dear Madam:

You may return the unsatisfactory stove by freight, collect, making use of the inclosed triplicate bills of lading and tag. After shipment, mail the original bill of lading to us in the inclosed envelop and we shall be very glad to send you another stove that you may select. We should be glad to send this stove now, but you have not told us just what you want.

We sincerely regret that you received a stove which did not prove to be just what you wanted, but we are glad you have called our attention to the fact, as we are always willing and anxious to live up to our guarantee of satisfaction. You may be sure that your reply will be given prompt attention.

A review of our records shows that we sell a great many more wickless oil-stoves than wick-stoves. Most of our customers find the wickless stoves more to their liking, and your stove, in particular, has been one of our best sellers. We believe that if you will try this stove for a while you will not think of returning it. If you decide to keep the stove no reply to this letter will be necessary.

Yours truly,

In this letter eagerness to satisfy the customer is plainly evident in the first sentence; then the writer makes a skilful transition to a definite suggestion—without the slightest hint of argument or even of a request—that the customer keep the stove. This letter was successful. No reply came back. Such letters as the two given above illustrate what a vast difference in effectiveness there may be between individual adjustment letters of the simplest type.

13. *List of practical pointers.*—A list of "Inside Tips on Adjustment Letters," has been prepared for a mail-order house. The following "tips" are quoted from this list:

Welcome every complaint.
Sympathize with the complainant.
Show willingness to make right any wrong.
Avoid promises unless you are sure you can keep them.
Get at the *facts* of the case.
Avoid arguments—state facts.
Be courteous, but not effusive.
Cheer up all the time.
Avoid weak-sounding apologies—admit derogatory facts frankly—make good with deeds rather than with words.
Have a good reason for each concession.
Never suggest that you suspect the customer of dishonesty or carelessness.
Give the customer the benefit of any doubt.
Don't cause the customer inconvenience, especially for anything that is our fault.
Satisfy the customer, if possible: but be just as fair to the house as to the customer. That's the only kind of fairness that is fair.

REVIEW

Why should the correspondent welcome complaints?

Mention other fundamental requirements with respect to the right attitude.

In writing adjustment letters why are many correspondents over-anxious to please?

How long should the adjustment letter be?

Why should the adjustment letter be fair to the house as well as to the customer?

Mention several fundamental ideas in connection with the construction of good adjustment letters.

Why could an unskilled correspondent succeed in writing simple adjustment letters?

Mention the most practical pointers on writing effective adjustment letters.

CHAPTER X

CREDIT AND COLLECTION LETTERS

1. *Highly specialized letters.*—Credit and collection letters are perhaps the most highly specialized of all types of correspondence. For many years it has been the universal practice to give a great deal of careful attention to this class of letters. In the past, when selling was relatively easy and satisfactory adjustments were not considered as important as they are now, and when competition for business in all lines was not as keen as it is today, the credit and collection problem was relatively greater than it is now, since more efficient cooperation in credit and collection machinery has become available, and business men have become educated to expect a more strictly businesslike treatment at the hands of credit and collection managers. Even tho credit and collection correspondence has been established in the business field longer than other specialized types, and notwithstanding the fact that more has been written on this subject than on any other type of letters, except sales letters, yet there are few credit and collection managers who feel at all satisfied with their skill in writing the kind of letters they wish to write.

2. *General purpose of credit and collection letters.*

—The first thing to be considered in writing effective credit and collection letters is the close relation they bear, not directly to sales, as in the case of adjustment letters, but to profits. The primary aim of these letters is to protect profits by securing payment for goods which have been bought and delivered, and to do this with the least possible expense and at the same time to exert the best possible influence on sales. The influence on sales, however, is a secondary consideration, altho it is, of course, desirable that a credit letter or a collection letter help the sales department as much as possible. Effective credit and collection letters are successful by virtue of the good salesmanship exercised in writing them. But writing a letter in which the principles of good salesmanship are incorporated as the means of making it effective, and writing with the direct influence on sales uppermost in mind, are not one and the same thing.

The primary task of the credit or collection correspondent is to prevent loss from bad debts *after* sales have been made. Credit letters look forward and collection letters look backward, so to speak, with respect to guarding against loss. The *purpose* of both is primarily negative and defensive, altho this purpose may be accomplished by means of the application of positive selling principles. The purpose is prevention of loss. This fact is too often lost sight of by the modern credit or collection correspondent, who is inclined to make too great an effort to avoid undesirable effects on sales in his attempt to protect profits,

in so far as profits depend on the prompt payment of accounts. He therefore often falls into the error of being too diplomatic.

3. *Being too diplomatic a mistake.*—In view of the fact that credit and collection correspondents very often have to deal with delicate situations it is only natural that they frequently carry diplomacy too far. Letters that are *obviously* diplomatic, like adjustment letters that are obviously courteous, are the least effective. In other words, here is another case of the misapplication of a rule, which serves to explain why it is often said that one cannot write effective letters merely by following set rules. Sometimes a letter is best when it calls a spade a spade, and apparently makes no attempt to be diplomatic. In such a case the reader is usually impressed with the sincerity and honesty of the writer. Those qualities command respect.

Here is a letter, for example, the writer of which did not command respect. He refuses shipment to a merchant whose credit standing is doubtful, and attempts to get him to agree to cash terms.

Dear Sir:

As you know, it is customary in all big wholesale houses to look up the credit rating of new customers before shipments are made on the credit basis. You, no doubt, do the same with your own new customers. Therefore we are delaying shipment on your valued order until our reports are complete.

Our outside reports are not sufficient to permit us to arrange this matter on an equitable basis. These reports all

speak highly of you in a personal way, but do not give us the required information concerning assets and liabilities to enable us to determine a credit rating, to which we feel confident you are entitled.

We inclose a statement and will appreciate it very much if you will fill it out so that we can fix your credit as high as you deserve. This information, we assure you, will be held in strict confidence and used only by ourselves.

Your order calls for goods to be shipped immediately. We will make an exception to our rule in this case. We suggest that you send us a draft by return mail, in consideration of which we will allow you a special discount of 5 per cent. But this concession applies, of course, only to this first order, for we are confident we can easily arrange credit for future shipments.

We trust you will take no personal exception to our above suggestions, which we have made solely in your interest.

Thanking you for the kindness of an immediate and, we trust, a favorable reply, we are,

Yours very truly,

This letter was used as a form. While it has many good features, it seldom influenced an addressee to send a statement of liabilities and assets. On the contrary, in several cases, the result was that the prospective customer tried to get the shipment without complying with the conditions. The credit man who used this letter found opportunity to talk confidentially with several merchants to whom it had been sent. He was surprised to find that his effort not to offend these men had failed. Their resentment was caused not so much by the "turndown" as by the obvious attempt to make the refusal diplomatic. They resented the facts that the writer apparently thought they were

the kind of men who had to be handled with gloves, and that he also seemed to think that they could not see thru his attempt to be diplomatic.

With this knowledge of the reader's point of view in mind, the credit man rewrote the letter as follows:

Dear Sir:

We find that the commercial agencies give you a low rating. We know, however, that the agency reports are sometimes wrong. But we always desire a personal statement direct from each new customer, and our regular form on which these statements are made is inclosed for your convenience.

As soon as we get your favorable report we shall make immediate shipment of your order. It is being prepared for shipment and will be forwarded as soon as we hear from you. If you care to avoid any delay due to the time it might take you in giving us the confidential statement requested, we will allow you a 5 per cent discount for cash by return mail.

This liberal cash discount, however, applies only to first orders. It is given because we feel that it is a fair concession to you under the circumstances; and, frankly, we do not want to miss the opportunity to ship the order. We know that our goods and services will satisfy you. We want this order to be the beginning of another good account for us.

You understand, of course, that any other wholesale house from which you would want to buy follows this same practice in opening new accounts. It means protection for you as a customer of ours. We await your commands.

Yours very truly,

This letter proved much more effective for accomplishing its purpose—to get the cash or the statement. In not a few cases, it brought a frank confession of

financial weakness, but with adequate assurance of growing strength sufficient to warrant a limited amount of credit. The main difference between this and the other letter is its evident directness and honesty. It was an unusual experience for the merchant to be told frankly in the first sentence of a letter of this sort that his rating was low—it was not "surprisingly low," or "lower than expected," or "comparatively low," nor did it even "happen to be low," but it was "low." The writer did not even "regret to find" it so. The addressee, knowing that what the writer says in the first part of the letter is true, would naturally believe that the rest is true also, and he would have a definite desire to make good with this kind of credit man, especially if he knew that his financial condition at the time was really sound enough to make his report favorable, or if he happened to have available the necessary cash.

4. *General requirements in writing effective credit letters.*—Effective credit letters are dignified—seldom apologetic in tone. They evince a strong but impersonal interest in the financial standing of the addressee. It is very important to treat all customers exactly alike. This is well illustrated in the successful letter just quoted. But even the fact that a firm has adopted this policy must not be unduly emphasized to the reader. It should be suggested rather than stated outright. Credit letters are also, almost invariably, earnest and confidential in tone. They seldom lapse into good nature as is the case with many suc-

cessful sales letters. Yet they are always optimistic. They also impress the addressee with the fact that the firm's interest and his own are, after all, identical.

The successful credit correspondent encourages directness, frankness and honesty by exhibiting those qualities himself. It is to be expected that these characteristics will be prominent in the personality of a good credit man; and letters reflect the spirit of the man who writes them. Naturalness is also important. The credit letter can be dignified without seeming to be unnatural. In fact, all the chief characteristics of effective letters are to be found in effective credit letters, just as they are in all other types of successful business letters. As a knowledge of conditions in each individual case is also very important, it naturally follows that few form letters are effective

5. *Use of "educational" credit letters.*—Many credit letters are designed to have an "educational" influence on the reader as well as to gain immediate results. This "education" consists, as a rule, in influencing customers to adjust themselves to the credit practices and policies of the house. The main idea is to make each customer thoroly familiar with these policies and practices, and to secure their favor and goodwill with respect to them, as well as to train customers to assume the right attitude toward credit matters in general.

For example, credit letters may impart such information as the following: the fact that a customer's credit relations with a house constitute a most im-

portant and serious business matter, that the credit department exists to serve the interests of the customer as well as those of the house, that the credit department always stands ready to help the customer solve his financial problems, and to give counsel concerning market conditions and sales, as well as the amount of purchases that constitutes the right proportion between assets and liabilities.

But the most important educational result of credit letters is that if they are sent promptly, as the occasion arises, they make it plain that the house adheres strictly to its credit policies and practices. Such letters, while they are always frank, direct and definite, avoid a dictatorial tone. The correspondent writes as if he took it for granted the customer knows that the credit rules and regulations are made in his interests. Gradually, if the letters are sent regularly and promptly, the customer becomes "educated" up to the requirements of the house.

6. *A letter refusing to allow discount.*—A good example of a case in which the success of an educational letter depends much on the previous "training" that the customer has received from the house, is that in which a customer deducts a discount to which he is not entitled by the terms of the sale. The kind of letter that such an occasion calls for is considered by many credit men to be a difficult type of credit letter, or collection letter, as some prefer to call it. One house wrote the following successful letter to a customer who had been well "educated." The addressee

had deducted a discount to which he was not entitled:

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your remittance of $58.80, just received. Our 2 per cent discount, however, does not apply on payments made more than 10 days after the date of the statement. We are therefore continuing a balance of $1.20 on this account, which you can add to your next payment.

Yours very truly,

The writer of that letter made no attempt at all to be "diplomatic," except in so far as he took it for granted that the reader would not be offended and therefore wrote the kind of direct and fearless letter that the reader expected to get from this house. The following letter would not have been as effective:

Dear Sir:

We thank you sincerely for your remittance just received, but note that your bookkeeper has probably confused our terms with those of some other wholesale house. We allow the cash discount for payment in ten days. It does not apply in this case, as you will agree. The difference is $1.20. Please include this amount with your next order.

Yours very truly,

"Alibi" letters of this sort are seldom, if ever, as effective as letters that possess the characteristic of credibility, discussed in Chapter III. Even a letter like the following tends to arouse doubt, and in many cases would not be as effective as one that gives only a plain statement of the facts.

Dear Sir:

It was, no doubt, merely an oversight on the part of your bookkeeper that discount was deducted on invoice No. 8,941, dated October 10th, as we did not receive your payment until December 3rd.

Will you kindly include this amount ($1.20) with your next order?

Yours very truly,

7. *Collection letters; general requirements.*—There is no fundamental difference between the requirements for writing effective credit letters and those for writing successful collection letters. The main difference between these two types of letters is in the object, or end; one *prevents*, the other attempts to *cure*. This difference is marked, but the means of gaining the end is the same in each case—writing from the reader's point of view.

As in the case of other letters, the right attitude toward the addressee is of fundamental importance. What attitude toward him will best enable the correspondent to write a letter that will secure payment, if possible, without arousing antagonism? That is a big question. To induce any addressee to pay out money and at the same time to keep his good-will, is, in most cases, a task that requires no little skill and tact.

"You can't get even with a man and get his money at the same time," is an epigram that contains sound common sense. The man who writes a successful collection letter generally insists confidently and firmly, but courteously, that the debt must be paid. He

makes it clear that it is not a question of the debtor's conferring a favor by settling, but that it is rather the privilege of the debtor to pay promptly what he owes. As stated in the letter in Chapter II, Section 9, "You have a little of my money," is the idea that the correspondent should emphasize. If he does so it is not likely that he will make the mistake of writing in the apologetic tone that marks so many collection letters, and so he will probably avoid the mistake of offering an excuse for wanting the money. A correspondent who takes this point of view will also, in all probability, make requests regularly for payments due. The fact that payment is often demanded only at irregular intervals explains why many accounts are uncollectable. They grow bad gradually, on account of the collector's lack of promptness and firmness.

Another general requirement is careful consideration of the true cause of the debtor's failure to pay promptly, as agreed. If the bill is not promptly paid when rendered, simply because the debtor is careless or is not in the habit of paying until he is requested to do so, a courteous request for payment is usually sufficient to secure results. If the debtor is unable to pay, the cause of inability to pay determines the kind of letter. Sometimes debtors are classified according to this basis as "good pay," and "bad pay," but such general classifications are seldom accurate, except when there is not the least doubt in which class the debtor belongs. It is best to cultivate considerable confidence and optimism in carrying on collection

correspondence. It is accordingly clear that a general use of the "bad pay" classification is likely to interfere with success. This does not mean, however, that it is not well to recognize the probability when a debtor has apparently made up his mind not to pay, but it does mean that it is seldom wise for a firm to let the debtor who is, without doubt, in the "bad-pay" class know that the house realizes what the situation is.

8. *Use of form letters.*—In collection correspondence each case is difficult. Carefully prepared form letters are used extensively, but they are most effective when skilfully adapted to the individual cases. Some collection men, however, favor the use of letters that are obviously forms because their use would plainly show the debtor that he was being treated in the same way as other debtors. It is safe to follow this practice in cases in which a simple reminder is all that is necessary. Yet, even in such cases, the use of a form might result in further delay since a form letter would carry the definite suggestion that delay is common, that other debtors are in the same boat, and that the failure to pay is considered lightly by the creditor.

The use of form letters, therefore, is not reconcilable with the sound theory that frankness and honesty of statement is always desirable. Nevertheless, a series of collection letters which usually begins with a "Please remit" stamped on a duplicate statement, and ends with a notification that legal action will be taken, has its place, especially when comparatively

little is known about the debtor. Such cases, however, ought to be few. A creditor seldom considers lightly the non-payment of a debt when payment is due; and honesty requires, as a rule, the omission of statements designed to compliment the debtor by trying to make him think the matter is not seriously considered. Moreover, even if the matter is considered of little importance, it is usually unwise to say so.

When a collection correspondent is writing concerning non-payment, if his attitude is right, his anxiety should be due to the fact that a contract is broken, and consequently one man is using money which belongs to another and the longer he uses it the greater is the injustice done. This should be the chief cause of serious consideration. If it is, for that very reason the writer will be optimistically confident of receiving payment. Direct, frank, honest statements that have a distinct ring of confidence in them are characteristic of successful collection letters. The following letter is a good example:

Dear Sir:

Our record of your account shows a balance of $40, due since April 1st. According to agreement this amount was to be paid on the first of this month. Just put the inclosed statement with your remittance in the inclosed addressed envelop—and let Uncle Sam do the rest.

Yours very truly,

That letter was successfully used by an insurance man in collecting many small accounts. It produced much better results than this letter:

Dear Sir:

May I call your attention to the inclosed statement of a small balance of $40, due on your account since April 1st. Your delay is no doubt due to an oversight, and we shall appreciate it very much if you will favor us with a remittance by return mail.

Yours very truly,

This letter does not arouse in the reader any desire to pay; rather it causes resistance. Its chief fault is the apparent eagerness to avoid giving offense. In the letter first quoted above, the expression, "let Uncle Sam do the rest" gives the necessary touch of good nature. It clearly suggests the writer's friendly attitude.

9. *Collecting retail accounts.* — Unpaid retail accounts are difficult to collect by letter for several reasons. The addressee is either not a business man with the business attitude toward debts, or he is inclined to be more sensitive about overdue household accounts than he is in regard to business debts. Then, too, credit arrangements in the accounts of retail customers are seldom as definitely fixed as when the debtor is a business firm. The difficulty, however, makes it even more advisable that retail credits be fixed on a business basis and that retail customers be "educated" in the necessity of observing the regulations that the firm establishes — in short, that they be influenced to expect courteous but emphatic insistence on prompt and regular payments.

Even when there are very definite credit arrangements, the retail debtor requires more careful handling

than a business firm. One grocer, for instance, finds that it pays him to include with all monthly statements, a blotter bearing a cheerful quotation in verse or prose, and a calendar for the month. He says that payments have come in more promptly since he began this practice. When customers fail to pay promptly, it is essential when letters must be used, that the retail collection letter be adapted to the individual case. Some of the suggestions made by one of the largest wholesale houses in the country to its customers, small town merchants for the most part, clearly present this problem. Excerpts from these instructions follow: [1]

Collecting money is like selling goods. It involves a knowledge of human nature and ability to select the methods that work best with individual debtors. No matter how carefully you pass upon your credit risks, some are sure to be slow in settling. Misfortune may befall them. Any one of twenty things may cause the customer to fall behind. It naturally follows, then, that the better you are acquainted with your debtors, the more successful will be your collection methods.

A very important essential of the successful collector is firmness. Many a dealer will not press a customer because he is afraid of losing his trade. So he lets the bill get bigger and bigger until finally the customer leaves because the bill has got beyond him. This is a very weak position and a useless one.

At the same time you must know the customer from whom you are trying to collect. What might answer with one will offend another. Understand the circumstances as completely as possible before you do anything.

[1] Quoted by permission, from the "Butler Way System Book," published by Butler Brothers, Chicago.

A grocer who insisted on collecting his bills on the 1st and 15th of each month noticed that one of his new customers was two weeks in arrears. So he wrote the customer reminding him very curtly that his account was running entirely too high and must be settled, as the policy of the store was that bills should be paid promptly on the first and the fifteenth.

The bill was paid. A check came by return mail. But the grocer never sold that family five cents' worth of merchandise again.

The fact was, that this customer's wife had been called away from home by the sickness of a relative. Her departure was sudden. The maid she left in charge of the house was not instructed to pay the grocer's bill—a very natural omission.

Then the grocer made his mistake. He found out afterward that the customer's financial standing was even better than his own—that the customer was good for many, many times the amount of the bill, and that he had a high position among business men. If he had investigated before writing the letter, of course, he would not have written it. He not only could have collected his money in due course, but now would be selling more groceries.

This loss to the grocer seemed unjust in a way. He had asked for nothing more than was due him. He had given the family his goods and was entitled to his money. Probably the aggrieved customer would admit as much. At the same time, the customer had a right to resent the unnecessarily sharp letter the merchant wrote. Anyway, he did resent it and this is what caused the grocer to lose.

You don't have to be apologetic about collecting your money. It is yours. But you do need to know your customers and to deal with them in accordance with what you know. If you don't you are likely to lose them.

10. *Suggestions for retail collections.*—As examples of letters that may help the retail merchant to

write successful collection letters, this wholesale house offers the following series, with comments:

THE FIRST LETTER

Dear Sir:

May we call your attention to the inclosed statement of your account? This is somewhat past due, as you will see by the date.

By the way, whenever you think of some improvement we could make that would render our store service more satisfactory to you, will you be kind enough to tell us about it? We surely appreciate your trade and want to do all we can to please you.

Thanking you for a response at your early convenience, we are,

Yours very truly,
SMITH & CO.

This letter is courteous and yet firm. It expresses no regret over having to remind the customer of his delinquency. It does not apologize for asking for money that is rightfully due to the store.

Note the second paragraph. This is a tactful compliment to the customer. As he reads it he will almost get the impression that you are asking him to give his opinion about the store and are mentioning the money incidentally. In any event the letter is one that few would take offense at. The sensitive past-due debtor will generally pay after being reminded of it in this manner. Or, if he can't pay, he will write or call upon you and give an explanation, telling the approximate date on which he expects to settle.

If this letter does not bring a response try a second one.

THE SECOND LETTER

Dear Sir:

Undoubtedly you have overlooked our other letter calling attention to your account. Accordingly, we are again reminding you of it.

Our books show you owe us. . . . Can you tell us approximately when you will be able to pay this?

Will you not let us know within the next day or two just what we may expect?

Yours very truly,

This letter is somewhat sharper in tone. It is very courteous, but not in the least apologetic or explanatory. It informs the customer that he is indebted to the store in a certain sum, and endeavors to get him to name a date upon which he will pay.

Note that in the concluding paragraph of the letter the debtor is told, in effect, that you expect to hear from him either with a settlement, or an explanation within the next couple of days. This letter will bring responses in a great majority of cases.

Now, you have disposed of all your highly sensitive people. You can deal with the remaining debtors on the list in a more straight-from-the-shoulder manner. You are right in assuming if neither money nor explanation is forthcoming after letter No. 2, that the person needs poking up in quite a sharp manner. Even at that, his silence should not be taken to indicate that he does not intend to pay. A thick hide rather than a dishonest nature may be the case. Assume, therefore, that you are going to get the money within a short time, and write him somewhat as follows:

THE THIRD LETTER

Dear Sir:

We are considerably surprised and just a little hurt that you have not acknowledged either of our previous letters regarding your indebtedness to us.

Of course, you have some good reason for not paying this money—a reason which, from your standpoint, may seem sufficient. But you have not told us anything about it. Won't you take us into your confidence RIGHT NOW?

We assure you we want to show you every consider-

ation. Yet it must be plainly apparent to you that your seeming neglect of this account will have a tendency to hurt your credit standing in this town.

Come in and let's talk the matter over. Or write us. You know our terms. The only condition under which we can extend credit is to have prompt settlement. We have done our part. When are YOU going to do yours?

Very truly yours,

This letter is firmer than the others. Yet it assumes that the customer really means to pay. It is, however, an outspoken demand for an immediate settlement—or at least an explanation.

Any person who makes no response after receiving this letter should be gone after hard.

Making allowance for local conditions and your acquaintance with the customer, the fourth letter should be written something after this fashion:

THE FOURTH LETTER

Dear Sir:

We have written three letters regarding what you owe us, but you have not replied. The letters haven't come back to us and so we are assuming you got them.

What is the matter? Surely the account is correct, or you would have told us so before this. And don't you think a person to whom you owe money is entitled to at least an explanation when the money is not forthcoming?

We think we have treated you fairly in this matter. You have enjoyed the advantages of this store on an equality with everybody else. Must we assume, therefore, that you are not going to carry out your part of the agreement you made when you opened your account with us?

For your own sake, as well as for ours, you surely ought to adjust this matter right now. A person's

credit is one of the most valuable things he has. We should regret it exceedingly if we should be forced to take steps in this matter that would injure your credit standing. We would feel better about the thing if you had acknowledged some of our letters. It certainly would help for you to tell us when you would attempt to pay.

We have tried all along to do right by you and shall continue to do so. In fact, we believe you will decide to make some adjustment of your account at once. If you do not, we shall have to take some other steps, which will not be pleasant for either of us.

May we be favored by an immediate response to this letter? We shall leave the matter open until next Wednesday, with the confident expectation that we shall hear from you by that time.

Yours very truly,

If even a letter like this does not wake up your delinquent, you have done all you can in a friendly way. It is now your duty to go after the gentleman with such other methods as you may have at hand. It is advisable to write him one more letter, sharp, curt and to the point, something like this:

THE FIFTH LETTER

Dear Sir:

We regret we have been forced to form the conclusion that you do not intend to pay us the money you owe us unless stern measures are taken. We have taken such measures. This is to inform you that unless we get a settlement of this account by tomorrow we shall enter suit. The consequences, of course, will be unpleasant to you. We can stand it, tho, much as we dislike such a procedure.

Yours very truly,

Under ordinary circumstances, in an average town, you probably will have had one or more personal interviews with

the debtor before writing him letters like number four or five. In this event the letter should be worded in a way to make allowance for things that might have been said during the interview.

It has been the aim, in the present chapter, to point out a few of the more exceptional features of the best modern practice in the writing of this type of letters. In fact, special types of letters, discussed in other chapters, are considered primarily for the purpose of illustrating the application of the chief principles that are of universal usefulness in writing effective letters of all kinds. The central aim thruout is to get at fundamental principles which are applicable in the writing of many kinds of letters.

REVIEW

What is the real purpose of credit and collection letters?

Explain the diplomacy of truthfulness and frankness.

State the main requirements for success in credit correspondence.

Is there any difference, as regards fundamental requirements for success, between credit and collection letters?

Mention the main requirements in the writing of successful collection letters?

What are the essential differences between retail and wholesale collection letters?

CHAPTER XI

TRAINING CORRESPONDENTS

1. *Trained correspondents in modern business.*—As a result of the increasing necessity of constant improvement in the selling end of business, many business concerns have taken an active interest in the training of their correspondents. The amount of favorable influence that a firm's correspondence exerts upon its sales is of course determined by the degree of skill which the correspondents possess. This skill comes almost invariably only as a result of training—chiefly self-training based on experience—but none the less training.

2. *Acquired qualifications.*—The knowledge, then, of persons, conditions and methods is *acquired.* Skill in accurate and forceful expression of thought is also acquired thru training. Many successful personal salesmen and correspondents dislike the word, training, because they associate it with the methods of the school-room. They probably realize the fact that self-training results in the best kind of salesmanship—including that which is involved in business correspondence—but they are often inclined to underrate the attempts that are made to supply them with the means of better and more rapid self-training.

Many houses, both large and small, have increased

their profits as a direct result of training their correspondents. This practice started years ago in houses that depended exclusively on the mails as their selling medium. It is now widespread, and doubtless, as the principles of effective letter writing become better known, the training of correspondents will become a more universal practice in business houses of all kinds. Training in written salesmanship brings results when the methods of training are in accordance with good common-sense principles of education.

3. *Results to be gained from training.*—On first thought it would seem that the question, "Why train correspondents?" could be easily answered in this way. "In order that they may gain more good-will from their letters, which will then bring more sales, therefore greater profits." But there are other ends to be gained, which are sometimes overlooked. One is the standardization of the tone, not only of all the letters that go out from a house—including routine as well as sales letters—but also of all written messages between the employes in the organization.

This point is well presented in a booklet published for the employes of Crane Company, Chicago, entitled "The Writing of Good Letters." The foreword of this booklet runs as follows

FOREWORD

This booklet is not a "ready letter-writer" designed for general use.

It is for the purpose of making the business correspondence of *Crane Company* more effective.

Its mission is to improve the quality and tone of all written communications between the Company's employes and its several departments and branches.

The end is, that good letter-writing may become a custom, and politeness a habit. The importance of this can not be over-estimated.

Every letter written and sent out by *Crane Company* must be worthy the character, traditions and standing of the house.

Many people know *Crane Company* thru correspondence only, and the conveyance of a good impression thru a letter is of great value, while a poorly constructed one will have the tendency to give a customer the idea that *Crane Company's* goods are also poorly constructed.

It is, therefore, essential that every person who is entrusted with writing or dictating a letter bearing the signature of "*Crane Company*" should be thoroly imbued not only with the *Crane Company* spirit, but also with the necessity of mastering the art of easy, correct and convincing letter-writing.

The habits to be formed in this field of responsibility are those of directness, smoothness, simplicity of diction, ease of address, conciseness and clearness.

The following hints do not aim to show every step, but point the way to the goal desired.

They are suggestions, which adopted, will be helpful to one wishing earnestly to make his letters models of business style.

4. *Personal note necessary in big business.*—As a business grows, the dominating personality in the business can not himself superintend the correspondence Often the letters gradually lose that personal touch which not infrequently has had much to do with the success of a business when it was young and comparatively small. One of the chief advantages that a

firm derives from training correspondents is that by so doing they enable their men to write letters that possess a tone and spirit truly characteristic of the firm. The larger the business becomes, the more necessary as well as the more difficult it becomes to write letters which will make the addressee feel that he is dealing with human beings much like himself, and not with a cold and impersonal "house."

Such training of correspondents is an effective means of securing uniformity of tone in all the letters. If some of the correspondents are not up to the standard in writing letters that are courteous, direct and business-like they are liable to destroy the good effect of those that have reached the top grade. Variation in the tone of letters, and even variation in appearance, is quickly noticed by the addressee and tends to lessen his confidence in the firm. Uniformity in the quality and appearance of letters, on the other hand, gives the reader a distinct and consistent personal impression of the firm, which is strengthened by each additional letter. Supervision of all correspondence is necessary to insure this uniformity, and supervision involves training. How to secure a uniformly high standard of excellence in a firm's letters is the main problem in training correspondents.

5. *Standardizing correspondence.*—The problem, therefore, is to bring all correspondence in a business up to a fixed standard, and then gradually to raise this standard thruout the entire house.

Standardization is accomplished first by establish-

ing definite standards with respect to excellence and the methods by which to attain it. The formation of a *definite* idea as to what the quality of the correspondence ought to be, and what kind of correspondent will be able to write a letter of the required quality, is the first step.

It is important to make sure that the correspondents employed are efficient. This involves one or both of two processes, securing better men to take the place of those not up to standard; and training present employes who are below standard so that they can fulfil the requirements. The latter cannot be done, of course, unless the correspondent whose work is deficient possesses the ability to improve.

6. *Right kind of timber.*—What type of person makes a good correspondent? His qualifications, apart from those ordinarily required for success in any other kind of work, are few. Of course the fact that correspondence influences sales and profits naturally implies that the correspondent's task is a difficult one, and that he must receive some training before he can write effective letters. With these facts in mind, one executive summarizes his requirements as follows:

A high-school education—or the equivalent of high-school training in ability to write correct English.
At least twenty years of age.
At least one year of experience in the business.
Able readily to talk to the point in simple language.
Natural carefulness in accurate expression of thought.
A sincere spirit of service and courtesy.

Sound moral character; plain honesty and truthfulness.
Willingness to learn from experience.
A good supply of common sense.

This official emphasizes the point that all-around business training and ability are of first importance, for if a man has these he will have the right attitude toward his work, and the ability to think thoroly and accurately. His greatest difficulty is to get correspondents who keenly appreciate the reader's point of view. He prefers a man whose selling sense is sound and abundant, and who has the knack of applying the principles of successful salesmanship.

7. *Supervision of correspondence.*—"Superintendent of Correspondence" is a title which is now frequently found in business organizations. Whether the organization be large or small, it is advisable to hold some one person, well qualified for the duty, responsible for the character of all the correspondence. This is now done in many concerns. In some instances this official is called the "Manager of Correspondence," and in others he is known as "Correspondence Critic." In very large organizations the work of supervising the correspondence is divided among several officials. But whatever the title of the office or the scope of responsibility, the duty is to keep all letters up to a high standard of efficiency, and the task is primarily to train the men who write them.

To this end the supervisor adopts a definite pro-

gram. He often holds conferences with individual correspondents and with groups. He prepares written instructions, often in the form of a manual of correspondence, and seeks to apply the soundest of pedagogical principles in his work. The main point here is that the reader should remember that this task of training correspondents is necessary and important for the reasons already stated.

8. *Conferences on correspondence.*—Many houses find the conference system of training correspondents very effective. Not a few firms regularly set aside an hour or so a week for conferences on this subject. As a rule, the correspondents study actual letters, both successful and unsuccessful. They think together on the problem of *why* a letter was or was not successful; they try also to determine how the unsuccessful letters could have been made effective, and how the successful letters could have been improved. These discussions involve the deepest principles of salesmanship, and are, as a rule, of absorbing interest, and of great profit to all concerned.

One advertising manager in an eastern concern which employs sales correspondents to cover the smaller towns of each state has secured remarkable results in two years' time by means of weekly conferences with these men and others in the organization who are interested in correspondence. He estimates from definite figures on sales that there has been a 40 per cent increase in their efficiency. This manager gives the following description of his methods:

I started these conferences with the idea of learning as much as my correspondents would learn about writing better letters; more, if possible. I was determined that it should be strictly a cooperative enterprise. I believed that we should all get together in order to find out how *we all* could improve our letters.

To encourage freedom of discussion, I always supplied copies of correspondence without any marks which would tell who had written the letters. I chose these examples carefully, edited out all marks of identification, had enough copies of each mimeographed so each man could have a set, and sent them around the day before the conference. They served as a reminder of the conference and gave each man a chance to do some thinking before he came.

Our first hour of conference was up before we had finished discussing the first letter, so the next time I tried the plan of having each man write out a summary of his criticisms of two letters. One was a good one, the other a letter that had failed. We covered more ground. I have since followed the plan of assigning definite lessons, but not arbitrarily. I got suggestions from all the men concerning their ideas of good assignments.

Each man has a hand in the creation of everything we do. For instance, we created a brief manual of instructions. There is not a man on the staff whose handiwork is not included in this manual. Each man has pride of ownership in it. In fact, I think that each one of the men feels that he himself created nearly all of this manual—which is not far from the truth, as a matter of fact.

One of the big results of these conferences was a general broadening of our information concerning various classes and types of our customers and prospects. We found that nearly all of our letters that failed showed lack of information that the correspondent might easily have had. We have developed the habit of cherishing every scrap of information that enables us to get a more accurate picture of our readers, and of reading with greater care the letters we answer.

9. *How to read a letter.*—The method pursued in the conferences referred to is best described by an illustration. Again, we use the words of the sales manager:

Take this example. Here's a letter from a man out in Lakeville, Indiana. I find that Lakeville is a little village of about 200 people; but something tells me that the letter was written by a better business man than you would expect to find in a village of that size, especially in a country village which is close to a big city like South Bend. In fact, this letter compares favorably in tone, thought, and expression and in general appearance with letters of inquiry from buyers in big stores. Here's the letter:

Gentlemen:

Your advertisement in the current *Hardware Dealer's Magazine* leads me to ask for more information about your product.

I am not sure that your system would sell to our trade, but it seems to me that there is a good market here for the right article in that line.

Yours very truly,

You see, it is really a good letter: He gives us as little definite information as possible about his situation. He wanted to make sure that he would get unvarnished facts. Yet his letter suggests a good market. He wants us to give his request careful attention. But the letter tells us more than this. The fact that he is willing to give our advertising credit for his interest is evidence that proclaims him a progressive merchant, especially so as it comes from a man in a very small town. Also, it looks as though he has not yet tried to sell another system, for he says in the second paragraph "*but it seems to me* that this is a good market." Now if he had said, "but there is a good market," and not "it seems to me," then it would not be so certain that he had not tried to sell some other system.

Therefore, this man is a good business man. His rating and his letter both suggest a big and profitable business, and the size of the town makes it certain that nearly all his business is done with farmers.

That is the way in which we thought about that simple letter of inquiry in one of our conferences. We wrote this man in about the same tone of down-to-business impersonal dignity that characterizes our letters to big buyers.

There is not much doubt that this advertising man's conferences were conducted in accordance with sound educational practice. At least he had in mind the important fact that the best kind of training in salesmanship is self-training, based on every-day business experience, and he did not forget that it is the chief function of the supervisor of correspondents to inspire his men with the desire to train themselves.

10. *Conferences with individuals.*—Many executives spend a half-hour now and then with each correspondent, running over his carbons, and making such suggestions as occur to them at the time. This work is important. Even the most valuable officer in the business can afford to give some of his time to it. Here again the problem is to get the correspondent to feel that he and the critic are *thinking together,* and to forget that his letters are being criticised. It is important, therefore, that the executive criticise favorably as well as unfavorably. But if a correspondent seems to resent just criticism, perhaps he is not the right man for that kind of work.

The mere fact that a man happens to be president, or vice-president or treasurer of an organiza-

tion is not, of course, proof that he could train correspondents successfully. Yet almost any executive who knows a good letter when he reads it could do this work if he were willing to devote to it the time and effort necessary. A man who has "a good ear" for effective letters, even if he lacks the ability to "lecture," may, in fact, become the best kind of coach on correspondence.

11. *Reading method of training.*—A Western manufacturer, who gets about 40 per cent of his sales by sending letters to dealers in various lines, has a manager of correspondence who picks out the letters that will sell, apparently by instinct. He is able, invariably, to forecast the comparative results of tests that the firm often applies to several letters written to accomplish the same result. He began work with this company as a personal salesman, and in that capacity visited nearly every state in the country when his firm was getting a foothold. The president of the company discovered that he could write a good letter, and before long placed him in charge of a mail sales department.

There are now eight correspondents in this department, and each one was trained by "Bill," the man who could judge letters. Bill, however, cannot point out just what is wrong with a poor letter, or just why a good letter will be successful. For the first few weeks after a correspondent begins work, Bill takes time to read every letter that the new man writes and asks him to rewrite every letter that does not

have the right "ring" to it. Bill gives him carbons of successful letters and tells him to read them all and to note any differences that distinguish them from his own. This is the main part of his training method.

The new man is kept reading successful letters until sooner or later he catches the right spirit and obtains sufficient information to enable him to write well enough so that, of all the letters he writes, perhaps half of them pass Bill's censorship. If the correspondent has the perseverance to stand this grind of reading and re-writing, he has the right stuff in him.

12. *Educational principles involved.*—The fundamental educational principles involved in training correspondents are the same as those which apply in training men for personal salesmanship, since correspondence is one phase of this art. A few of the more basic considerations follow:

Good selling sense is the basis of the ability to write effective letters—letters that cause the reader to think and feel and do as the writer desires.

Selling sense may be developed. Salesmen are both "born" and "made." There is no limit to the possible improvement of the selling sense in any individual.

Self-training is the best kind of training in written salesmanship, as well as in personal salesmanship.

Actual experience is the best basis of self-training. Help from reading and from personal criticism is

effective in so far as it tends to stimulate self-training.

In self-training the correspondent takes advantage of the opportunities that his practice offers to find out why his letters succeed or fail, and how to cut down the percentage of failures.

Willingness to learn from experience—from the experience of others as well as his own—is characteristic of the man who has good selling sense.

The amount of training that the correspondent gets out of his experience varies with the amount and quality of the thought that he puts into it.

Among other things, the thinking that he does should include a definite conception of what constitutes good selling sense.

Whether or not the correspondent will have the right attitude toward the addressee depends largely upon whether or not he possesses the proper personal qualifications—optimism and aggressive confidence, for instance. These, in turn, depend to a considerable degree upon sound health, which is almost as important to the correspondent as to the personal salesman.

The importance of mental qualifications is being more and more emphasized. Effective writing is based on sound thinking, and that is based on complete and accurate information, such as that outlined in Chapter I, Section 10.

The most important information that a correspond-

ent can possess is that which enables him to know his proposition from the addressee's point of view.

It is well for the man who attempts to train correspondents to give some attention to basic considerations of this sort; and it is a good thing for the correspondent himself to do a great deal of thinking about the best means of improvement. It is well for him to remember, for example, that the big difference between correspondents nowadays is in the kind of thinking that they do *before* they write; that the quality of this thinking depends upon the completeness and accuracy of the information that they possess; and that much or little training may be gained from experience, according to the desire and inclination of the individual.

13. *Manuals of instruction for correspondents.*—In preparing a manual of instruction or guidance for correspondents, it is well to bear in mind certain effective educational principles, one of which is to avoid dogmatic rules stated in dogmatic terms.

The rule, "Under no circumstances, shall a correspondent misspell the addressee's name. This error is unpardonable. You can't make it and work for us very long," might much better be stated as follows:

> How do you feel when you get a letter with your name misspelled, or the address wrong? Your addressees are all sensitive people. "They don't even think enough of my business to get my name spelled right," is the way the customer feels about it. Misspelled names and incorrect addresses kill a great deal of business. We naturally refuse to pay men to kill our business.

Sound reasoning, *concrete* expression and a tone of sympathy and good nature, mark the manual that is read with interest. It possesses all the chief characteristics of an effective letter. It is a work of salesmanship in itself. It shows a keen appreciation of the reader's point of view. Consider, for instance, the first paragraph of the Crane Company's manual quoted in Section 3 of this chapter.

Manuals of correspondence vary greatly in subject matter as well as in style of presentation. Some cover all kinds of correspondence completely; in fact, they constitute good practical text books on the subject. Others consist of merely a few brief instructions concerning the mechanical appearance of the letter; these are more truly handbooks for stenographers than they are manuals for correspondents. A review of the contents of a manual of a large company will give a better idea than can be obtained from a general explanation. From this "text book" the correspondent receives part of his training; for the rest he must depend upon experience.

This manual contains about forty pages, which are 12 inches long and 9 inches wide. The paragraphs are brief and crisp, and many of the important words are capitalized. The first part of the manual, entitled "The Letter Salesman," brings out clearly the fact that good salesmanship is the big requirement in all successful correspondence. But salesmanship must be defined and accordingly the manual gives the company's definition as follows:

The *manner*, the *method*, and the art of *most economically* effecting the exchange of an article for money to the *equal* and *permanent satisfaction* of *both buyer* and *seller*.

The close connection between salesmanship and effective letter-writing is emphasized, in part, in the following manner:

Your sentences may be lined up as regularly as soldiers on parade; your grammar and rhetoric may be so perfect that the most exacting critic could find no fault — but unless *salesmanship* is there, unless your letters have "the reason-why" argument, they won't be the kind that produce results.

Again, this is the excellent list of characteristics of a salesman as given in this manual:

Sincere and convincing, neat in appearance, courteous, knows all about his goods, knows them to be the very best goods in the world for the money, *enthusiastic*, clear in answers to all questions, earnest and of the right *spirit*.

And Part One, which is not prefaced by any introduction or foreword, contains also this important advice:

Use every-day words, plain thoughts, plain illustrations— But what you say must hit straight from the shoulder. . . . Don't grind out letters like a school boy reciting his lesson. Talk humanly *to* your customer, not *at* her. Talk as you would if she were sitting beside your desk. You know what you would say if she were there. Why not say it? . . .

Use your heart as well as your head. *Be humanly yourself*—be natural. . . .

People you write to are living, doubting, considering human beings like yourself. . . .

Make it plain to the customer that your goods are the

kind she needs. Make her say, "That seems reasonable—that's so." . . .

Leave nothing to be taken for granted. Simple little matter-of-fact points may seem commonplace to you, but may be just what your customers want to know.

Thus much of the information is definitely designed to enable the correspondent to understand the customer's point of view better.

One of the most significant sentences is this: "Grammar and rhetoric can be learned—*so can salesmanship.*"

This manual contains, besides the other valuable information, numerous general statements concerning traits of human nature. Its most striking characteristic is concreteness. A generous number of illustrations serve to make clear and forceful the ideas that are presented.

14. *Contents of a manual for correspondents.*—The manual just mentioned takes up all essential requirements, including knowledge of words, grammar and rhetoric, the company's business in general, and how mail is received, assorted and distributed. The classification of mail is explained in detail, and the methods of handling each class is made clear. But even this technical information is given in such a way that true salesmanship receives strong emphasis; for example, in the treatment of "inquiry" mail, the fact is emphasized that this mail is an important source of new business if the proper skill is used in handling it. And the following sentence emphasizes

an important point in regard to adjustment correspondence.

A complaint always means that we are dealing with a real customer, not a prospect. It is better and easier to keep our present customers satisfied than to get new ones.

That part of the manual which deals with correctness of expression includes a list of phrases, several pages long, which are not to be used. In each case the reason why the expression is undesirable is stated. These pages are arranged as follows:

Do Not Say	*Say Instead*	*Reason*
Inclosed herewith	Inclosed	"Inclosed" can mean *only* herewith. You cannot inclose anything under separate cover.
We regret *to inform* you that your order has been delayed.	We regret that your order—	It is not the informing that we regret, but the fact.
Thru an oversight *on our part*	Thru an oversight	"On our part" is unnecessary.

This valuable list of "what not to say," as the illustration indicates, consists of actual errors in expression which are frequently found in letters written by careless correspondents. It is usually possible for a correspondence critic to accumulate in a comparatively short time a long list of errors of this sort. A tabulation of errors in thought also serves a valuable purpose very often, especially if it is made out in the form given above.

This manual also includes many examples of good opening and closing sentences, and an extended dis-

cussion of adjustment correspondence with many illustrations. In short, it contains all the information that a good correspondent in this particular business ought to possess. Its purpose is not only to impart information, but also to inspire enthusiasm, zeal for improvement, concentration, and a sincere interest in the work.

In general, it may be said that the manual of correspondence in almost any business is so important an influence in the training of correspondents, that even the considerable expense necessary to make it as complete and efficient as possible is a good investment. This means that the manual may well include an explanation of all the main principles upon the observance of which the success of all business letters depends, and that it should be shown how these principles, with slight variations, apply in the writing of all the different types of letters.

The preparation of an effective correspondence manual, like the construction of a folio of effective form paragraphs, is an evolution. It would be well if everybody in the organization could have a hand in its composition, especially the correspondents for whom it is prepared. The complete manual of correspondence includes, instruction concerning the mechanical form and appearance of all letters, including inter-organization communications; information concerning what constitutes a good letter, with illustrations, and the general policies that govern the writing of various classes of letters.

15. *Training in foreign correspondence.*—Correspondence with business firms in foreign countries is becoming more and more important. It no longer suffices that the correspondent know well the foreign language in which he must write his letter, it is also necessary that he be thoroly acquainted with the fundamental principles of selling. Careful adaptation to the customs that prevail in the addressee's country is necessary. The foreign correspondent should be a real salesman, whose salesmanship is based on universal principles of success. The reader's point of view—based on a thoro knowledge of the business customs of the foreign country—is one such principle.

REVIEW

What is the connection between the standardization of correspondence and the training of correspondents?

How can standardization of correspondence be effected?

Could a high-priced official afford to give his time to supervision of correspondence?

What is the greatest benefit to be gained from these conferences?

What is the best way to make conferences on correspondence successful?

How can a conference with an individual correspondent be conducted so that it will be successful?

Mention the more important educational principles involved in the training of correspondents.

Discuss the nature and the uses of manuals of correspondence.

CHAPTER XII

BUILDING THE LETTER

1. *Successful letters built on good salesmanship.*—One could not overemphasize the fact that successful letters are built on good salesmanship—whether or not the writer is conscious that he is applying selling principles. If he does consciously practise these principles, however, his letter will be all the better on that account, for he will be much less likely in so doing to make fundamental mistakes. Good salesmanship will mean to him, primarily, a knowledge of conditions. He will give himself adequate opportunity to learn the reader's point of view, and will make good use of this knowledge as his best guide in building the letter.

2. *No fixed process.*—Few successful correspondents build their letters *consciously* by means of a fixed process. This fact, however, does not mean that it is not valuable to know a fixed process that will be of help in the building of a successful letter. Many people play the piano by ear, for instance, but the greatest players are those who possess a thoro knowledge of the technic of their art. For each one who plays well by ear, hundreds play well because they have devoted many hours to the study of harmony and counterpoint, as well as countless hours in finger

exercises. In letter writing, which is about as much of an art as piano playing, the case is similar. The possession of a native ability to write effective letters is highly desirable, but it constitutes a strong argument for studying technic, and not, as some seem to think, against it. The man who writes letters "by ear" is never as sure that his letter will be successful as the man whose natural ability is coupled with a knowledge of the principles of successful salesmanship.

3. *Fundamental steps.*—While it is probably true that no hard and fast rule for building a successful letter can be laid down, yet among many writers of effective letters we find agreement in regard to the fundamental steps.

Men who have little or no experience in one kind of business, especially experience in dealing with customers, are seldom able to write successful selling letters to prospective customers of that business, no matter how skilful they may be in expression. On the other hand, men who have had the necessary experience in their particular line of business cannot write successful letters unless they know how to express themselves effectively. One point, then, on which authorities agree, is that business experience and the ability to express one's self are both fundamental requirements for success in correspondence.

Nearly all writers of effective letters agree that the correspondent should think carefully before he writes. When a letter fails, it is generally because

the writer has not done this. It is true, of course, that the man who has had years of experience does not need to give so much time to the planning of his letter. But this does not mean that he need not plan it at all; it simply means that his previous experience enables him to plan much of his letter *as he writes*. The great advantage of planning beforehand is that when the time comes for writing, the correspondent is free to concentrate on effective presentation.

Another fundamental point of agreement among successful sales correspondents is the necessity that the correspondent have clearly in mind as he writes the specific and definite purpose of the letter; and, equally important, a *definite* knowledge of the impression, or the series of impressions, that he wishes to make upon the reader in order to gain the desired end. Moreover, it is agreed that the writer should know what facts will be most likely to make each impression; as well as what kind of expression is most likely to convey the facts clearly and forcibly to the reader's mind.

Expert correspondents also agree on the importance of a proper arrangement of facts and impressions. They are also agreed that there is no *essential* difference between the construction of an effective routine letter and the composition of a forceful sales letter. If this is so, a study of sales correspondence is of considerable value to the man who writes any kind of a business letter, irrespective of the amount of influence that it exerts upon sales.

4. *Facts and other material.*—Giving facts alone, if believed, would often make a letter successful. Failure often results because facts are obscured by an expression that is too profuse, or by argument or persuasion. In short, the reader loses sight of them and will seldom take the trouble to pick them out from among a surrounding mass of words and phrases. Newspapers interest us because they are full of new facts—of news. Material other than facts is worse than useless unless it helps the reader to place a favorable interpretation upon the facts presented. But the impressions desired are made primarily by the facts themselves. The human mind craves facts and is disappointed in letters in which facts form only a small proportion of all the material. Too many letters are of this kind.

5. *What facts shall be used?*—Two leading questions are: 1. How shall each fact be presented? 2. What facts shall be used? The first question has been answered in previous chapters, in which the arrangement of material was discussed. The second question brings up new and important considerations.

Since facts are interesting to the reader in proportion to the "news value" that they possess, the correspondent should know what facts are richest in this kind of value. The news value of facts depends upon how closely the reader associates them with his previous knowledge and experience, especially with his main self-interest.

The correspondent should select those facts which

are most likely to cause the reader to feel that compliance with the writer's wishes would most nearly lead to the satisfaction of his own desires. The less the writer's proposition appeals to the reader's self-interest, under existing conditions, the less reason there is to expect that the letter which presents that proposition will be effective.

6. *Building routine letters.*—What has been said about facts and the choosing of them, is applicable in routine correspondence as well as in sales correspondence. When an order is to be acknowledged, for example, what facts must be presented if the purpose of the letter is to be accomplished? What is the purpose of the letter? As explained elsewhere, it should be to make the customer feel so well satisfied because he sent his order to this firm that he will wish to send other orders later. What facts will best accomplish this purpose? Generally the correspondent should acknowledge the receipt of the order and express appreciation; inform the reader that it is receiving prompt attention; promise that it will be filled accurately; state how and when the goods will be shipped, and, if the reader has given any special instructions, assure him that they will be carefully followed. In short, the letter should contain the facts that will make the customer's satisfaction, as far as possible, complete. Thus nearly all the fundamental considerations in sales correspondence hold good in all other kinds of correspondence.

7. *Have definite knowledge of impressions to be*

made.—The young man who wrote the following letter, which was successful, said that before he wrote it he had in mind several impressions which he thought would cause certain druggists who had refused to stock his specialty the year before, to modify their decision. First, he wanted to impress the reader with the fact that his product sells readily and repeats, in order that the prospect might draw for himself the obvious conclusion that the product gives the consumer entire satisfaction. Next, he wanted to make sure that the reader would be impressed with the truth of these facts. Then, he wanted each letter to give the impression that his concern could do without the druggist's order if necessary; that is, he wanted to impress the fact that his concern is self reliant, also that he was not trying to force the druggist to order. He wanted to make the druggist feel that his order was being solicited on a sound business basis. He also desired to emphasize the fact that the specialty which he wanted him to sell is not an article of seasonal use only, so that the druggist would not refuse to accept the proposition for fear of overstocking. Last, he wanted the druggist to get the impression that he ought to be "in on" this, and since this offer might be his last opportunity, he ought to accept it immediately. All these impressions were made in the following one-page letter:

Dear Sir:

Competing druggists in your town last spring and summer sold 76 gross of El Vampiro, the non-poisonous powder

which kills flies and bugs, including the toughest species of the cockroach family.

All but ten gross of this business came to us as repeat orders. Our special window displays started retail sales, and El Vampiro kept them on the increase.

These are facts. Your fellow-druggists will tell you that El Vampiro sells and satisfies—that they sold 76 gross last year. In fact, their sales have kept on during the winter months. But spring and summer are the seasons for the rapid sale of the "fly and bug killer in the bellows box."

The inclosed folder tells you that there is a generous profit in El Vampiro. Your stock will turn as often as twice a month during the summer months. Other druggists in your town did it. Can you?

Our "every-man-in-on-it" offer will be held open for your acceptance until April 30. We would hold it open longer, but there is a limit to our supply of El Vampiro.

Yours very truly,

This letter includes nearly all the chief characteristics of effective letters. The opening words, "Competing druggists in your town," grip the reader's interest. Then the writer makes the impressions he planned to make. The letter has individuality. It is filled with pertinent facts. It is definite and diplomatic. The expression is natural and business like. The tone is respectful and courteous. Not all these characteristics are apparent unless the critic is able to put himself in the place of a druggist.

8. *A self-question chart.*—As a mechanical aid for his staff of sales correspondents, whose duty it was to cooperate frequently in writing form sales letters, the advertising manager of a manufacturing plant devised the following chart of questions.

A. To be answered before you write the letter:

1. Definitely, what is the fundamental purpose of your letter?
2. What type of person is the addressee?
   In case you are writing this letter to a class of buyers, address your letter to an individual—if possible a real person with whom you are acquainted—a person who typifies the class. Know this addressee as thoroly as possible. Visit with him, if possible; draw on all your experience in dealing with him both by correspondence and in person; ask questions about him of those who are well acquainted with him. Find out all you can about him. SEE him; where he lives, his occupation, his habits, his hobbies, his aims, his temperament; and give particular attention to the following questions:
3. What is your addressee's knowledge of, and attitude toward you, toward this business, toward your proposal, and toward our competition?
4. What are the definite impressions necessary to make your letter accomplish its definite, fundamental purpose?
5. What are the addressee's probable resistances to each of these impressions, and what *facts* will gain each impression in the face of these resistances?
6. What are the addressee's self-interests to which your proposal will appeal most strongly?
7. What arrangement of impressions, or selling points, will be most effective—will be most likely to increase the reader's interest as he reads?
8. Does the plan of your letter make it as easy as possible for the reader to do as you wish, and as difficult as possible for him not to do as you want him to?
9. How can you best appeal to a strong feeling of self-interest in the reader right at the start of your letter—in the very first sentence, if possible?

B.—To be answered as you write:

1. Just how will each word, phrase, statement, and paragraph impress the reader?

C.—To be answered after you have written:

1. Will the very first part of the letter get favorable attention and cause the reader to want to read on. (This usually means a direct, concrete, and convincing appeal to one or more of the reader's personal desires, and a forecast of the possible satisfaction of the desire as a result of reading the letter.)
2. Will the reader's interest increase as he reads? (Do you keep him in the letter? Could you add or subtract anything and thereby increase his interest?) Remember, you must make him read, and read with keen interest, or your effort is likely to be wasted. *Lead* him to a *climax* of thought and feeling which causes him to be willing to do as you wish.
3. Will the reader believe *all* the statements you make? Is it all the truth *from his point of view?* Do you give him facts, and not your own arbitrary opinions or conclusions? Do you avoid telling him what he already knows (as well or even better than you)? Especially, do you avoid telling him what he ought to know, so that he might get the impression that you think he does not know? Do you supplement his knowledge of facts so that he will be likely to conclude for himself that he ought to do as you want him to?
4. Do you cause him to get a vivid impression of the resulting good to him of doing as you want him to?
5. Will your closing sentences be likely to cause him to *act* upon his willingness to do as you want him to? Does he get a *definite* suggestion of just how he may do as you want him to? Have you avoided the hackneyed "do-it-now" close?

6. Is your expression effective? Is it all clear to him? Does it *all* sound natural and sincere to him? Is it free from hackneyed phraseology and lifeless expressions? Is it direct and simple and definite, and free from waste of words and unnecessary statements. Does it attract the eye?

9. *Use of this chart.*—The executive who prepared this chart attributes to the use of it a phenomenal increase in the results gained not only from the form sales letters written by his staff of correspondents, but also from the letters sent to individuals. He is now using the chart in a modified form as a guide for general correspondents, and is also getting out editions of it especially adapted to the requirements of each department. The questions above quoted are the set of general questions that apply to the sale of almost any product or service. For the sake of illustration, imagine the following conditions calling for a letter to be written according to the directions of this Self-Question Chart.

A firm manufactures orthopedic specialties—foot-arch supports, heel-pads, and so on. The sales are made thru the agency of retail shoe merchants mainly, and the firm wants these merchants to understand the human foot, its more common ailments and deformities, their cure and correction. Therefore, as the means of giving shoe merchants this information, which would cause them to give consumers of the products better service, the concern has published a book entitled "The Human Foot."

Since the firm wishes not only to get this book into the hands of as many shoe merchants as possible, but also to have the merchants get its contents into their heads, they charge something for it. Possibly they could afford to give the book away, but the management believes that the fact of the merchants' having to pay for it will convince them that it is worth something, and that therefore they will read and appreciate it. The price, $3.00, compares favorably with that placed on other technical books of this sort.

The purpose of the letter, then, is to cause the shoe merchant to want this book so much that he will be willing to send $3.00 for it. It is the only work of its kind in existence and will therefore be of considerable interest to the men to whom it will go. The firm has been dealing with shoe merchants for many years and feels well acquainted with them. The merchants know that there is good profit in handling the line, and will naturally respect the suggestion that they should get the information which this book will give them. Therefore it will probably be possible to write a letter that will sell the book to them.

10. *Impressions desired.*—What impressions will arouse in the merchant so strong a desire for information that he will send us $3.00 in order that he may obtain it? First, it might be well to awaken in him an ambition to make his business grow; next, to give him the impression that this book will help him realize his ambition. To make him really believe that the information will be the means of growth and

greater profits—that is the most important purpose that the firm wishes to accomplish. How? What will be his resistances? What facts will overcome them? With these questions in mind the management decides that it would be effective to give an example of what results will be secured by reading this book. They believe that this example would probably serve both to increase the merchant's ambition and to make him feel that possibly their letter offers the means of growth and consequently of greater profits. The firm wishes also to give the merchant a definite idea of the contents of this book—to make it as real to him as they can—as well as to convey as vivid an impression as possible of the favorable results that he can obtain from reading it. They must avoid arousing any possible prejudice that he may have in regard to purchasing any book of this kind, or concerning a "book" knowledge of his business.

11. *Beginning of the letter.*—Suppose that the management, having done a great deal of thinking along the lines indicated, decides to cite the case of a merchant who bought and read this book a year or so ago, and to show what information he got from it. Such a case, they believe—and rightly—ought to make a good point of contact, if presented concretely. To secure vividness, they begin by quoting this man. (Put yourself in the place of a shoe merchant in a town of about 20,000 people, and imagine, as you read, the impression that each statement would make upon him.)

Dear Sir:

"I am considered the leading shoe merchant in my town. This was not so true a year ago. But during the past year I have succeeded in causing the people to feel that I *know* my business. My sales have jumped 24 per cent. My net profits are better by 30 per cent. My bank balance tells me this."

A shoe merchant visiting in Chicago—his name will be given on request—told me this not long ago. I asked him how he did it, and he answered:

"The information in your new book for shoe dealers helped me do it. I studied the human foot. I learned a lot about its ailments and deformities, and how to prevent or correct them. I made a talk before the high school students on the care of feet. The parents heard about this. They appreciated it. I put in a little orthopedic department in my store, and did some advertising along the lines you suggested. I used some of the ads you get out for dealers. And the first thing I knew, I found that people began to think that I knew my business exceptionally well—and I do. Of course I knew it pretty well before I read the book I got from you, but that book helped me make people in my town realize how well I know my business—and that is more important."

Now what impression would these first three paragraphs make on the reader? Would not the first paragraph cause him to speculate on his relative standing as a shoe merchant in his town? And could he so speculate without feeling a strong desire to be considered the leading shoe merchant? In other words the correspondent has made, at the very beginning, a concrete appeal to a strong personal desire. Furthermore, this paragraph would be of considerable interest to the reader because it is a brother mer-

chant in another town telling his successful experience. The second paragraph immediately makes it plain who is doing the talking, before the reader's curiosity on that point could distract his attention. It is important to remember that if there is an unanswered question in the reader's mind, it is always a difficult task to hold his interest.

12. *Reader's questions determine arrangement.*— After reading this paragraph, the merchant would naturally wonder, "Well, how did he do it?" Therefore, he would probably read the third paragraph with considerable interest, but also with considerable skepticism. But the *direct* and *detailed* statements of facts ring true, and there is every probability that after he finished the third paragraph he would be curious to know just what kind of book this is. Therefore the fourth paragraph ought to be made to satisfy him on this point. It reads like this:

This man refers to my new book, entitled "The Human Foot," written especially for shoe merchants and their clerks. It is the only book of its kind ever written. Every one of the 390 pages is interesting, altho the subjects—foot anatomy, and foot deformities and their treatments—are technical. Those subjects are important to the shoe man who wants to know his business as thoroly as possible; but you will find much more in this book. Pages 297 to 317, for example, give an interesting history of footwear, from ancient to modern times, and all the changes in style are illustrated with ninety-seven interesting pictures. Chapter 40, on "Fitting Shoes," is a practical treatment of this important subject, while Chapter 41 tells all about proper and improper kinds of hosiery. A chapter is given to each of the common foot ailments, so written that you not only get a

surgeon's knowledge of the human foot—you enjoy the process of getting it.

Thus, the correspondent aims to satisfy the reader's chief interest *after* it is aroused. This paragraph, placed at the beginning of the letter, would be dull to the reader. The arrangement that has been made is a good illustration of consideration of the reader's point of view. There is strong temptation for the writer, immediately after the third paragraph, to say, "This merchant did it; so can you." But such a statement would be out of place there, because the question uppermost in the reader's mind at this point is probably, "Well, just what book is this?"

13. *Picturing and proving the results of acceptance.*—Having gained from the first part of the letter a definite idea of the contents of the book, the reader is likely to ask himself, as he goes on, "what use would this information be to me?" The next part of the letter anticipates such a question and answers it effectively.

> And after you get this information—What?
>
> Increased sales of foot-comfort appliances at big net profits; increased sales of shoes; bigger future business, owing to increased comfort from the shoes you sell—from the same shoes you are now selling; gradual increase of the feeling in your town that you know your business exceptionally well. Any one of these advantages is worth many times the price of this book. Will you really get these results? Listen:

Thus the writer gives the shoe dealer a rapid, compact summary of the benefits he can derive by doing

what the former wishes him to do—send for the book. Then he anticipates the doubt that is bound to arise concerning these benefits, and holds the reader's interest by anticipating another question that the reader would naturally ask—"Will I really derive these benefits?"—and answering it. The answer of the writer takes the form of evidence so strong that it invites belief:

This book, "The Human Foot," is really the first fundamental scientific textbook for the retail shoe business. It helps you lift shoe-selling from a trade into a profession—and you will agree that a shoe merchant must make a scientific profession of his business in order to make real money in these days of rising costs. This book is not in any sense a "get-rich-quick" scheme. But it does offer the chance to get the kind of unusual information that will help you increase your prestige and improve your business by enabling you to get more people to trust more in you as a merchant who KNOWS his business exceptionally well. Many merchants, both in this country and abroad, have done what the merchant I quoted above has done.

With its definite point of agreement, that "a shoe merchant must make a scientific profession of his business in these days of rising costs," and with its anticipation of possible resistance, embodied in the statement, "This book is not in any sense a 'get-rich quick' scheme," such a paragraph of definite assertions at this point in the letter will constitute strong evidence in the mind of the man who really wants to believe, because he has had a clear vision of the results that he can secure if what is said is true. And the reader

will have this vision if the letter has been well planned and well constructed, if the ideas are expressed in both concrete and general terms. The concrete should precede the general. The paragraph last quoted will serve to recall to the reader's mind the concrete case with which the letter starts

14. *Focussing the appeal directly on the reader.*— Now, therefore, is the time to state more positively and directly the advantages that the book holds for *this* merchant. He would be ready for such a statement by this time. He would be much less inclined to resist the following statement than if it were made earlier in the letter, a fact which goes to prove what has already been said—that the credibility of a letter depends somewhat upon the arrangement. The letter continues:

> No matter how much prestige you now enjoy in your town, this book will help you add to it. If this statement is true, of course you won't want to ignore it; and without expense you can find out whether or not it is true.

By means of such a statement the writer avoids any possible implication that the addressee is without prestige in his town—a good illustration of diplomacy. If the writer now answers satisfactorily the reader's mental question, "How can I find out whether or not this statement is true?" by arousing the reader's curiosity and his desire for information, he will have made it all but impossible for him not to send for the book. The interest of the average merchant, as he

reads this letter, would naturally rise to a climax resulting in action—the kind of action that the writer desires.

15. *Close of this letter.*—The writer aims to increase the reader's interest still more by means of the following paragraph, and at the same time to make him realize that the offer, tho by no means an unusual one, is of the kind that is not generally made unless the seller believes thoroly in his product. The letter concludes as follows:

> I back up my belief in this book as a valuable asset in *your* business with an offer of the sort that I could not afford to make unless all that I say were founded on my experience in selling orthopedic supplies to shoe merchants for more than a decade. The offer is this.
>
> If you are not entirely satisfied with this book *after you have read it* return it at my expense and I will return your money.
>
> Just sign and return to me the inclosed order, and in a day or so your copy will be on its way to you.
>
> Yours very truly,

Thus the letter has been brought quickly to a confident close, and yet its effect has not been weakened by the statement of any obvious conclusions in connection with the guarantee—as, for example, the too common "No risk to you." The whole proposition sounds natural and sincere. The tone is sufficiently dignified and courteous The personal pronouns "I" and "you" are used after and not before the reader and writer come to feel acquainted. The letter is clear and free from hackneyed phraseology, and seems en-

tirely credible. The statements are direct, simple, and definite, and there is no waste of words. In short, the letter contains all the chief characteristics of an effective letter as set forth in a preceding chapter. It is a good letter *because it was written from the reader's point of view.*

This letter, in substance, was composed by the executive who devised the self-question chart quoted in Section 8. He unconsciously guided himself by this chart in writing the letter, which has brought big returns. It not only makes the shoe merchant want the book enough to send for it, but it makes him want it so much that he is actually impatient for its arrival.

A chart of this kind is useful in helping the correspondent get the habit of putting the right kind of thought into his letters; it helps him build them on good salesmanship, instead of writing them in a hit-or-miss fashion. Not only the form sales letter, but all the letters the correspondent dictates and all the general correspondence should be written in this way. The use of a chart like this makes letter writing slow at first—until the writer gets the habit of automatically doing the kind of thinking upon which all effective letters are based—thinking that is inspired by a keen appreciation of the reader's point of view.

REVIEW

Mention the fundamental points of agreement among expert correspondents concerning the process of writing effective letters. Compare the relative value of facts and other material.

In general, what facts is it best to use in a sales letter?

Explain the value of the correspondent's having a definite knowledge of the impressions he wishes to make.

What is the connection between the self-question chart quoted and the reader's point of view?

Why should the correspondent picture for the addressee the benefits to be derived thru purchasing?

Could sales letters be written successfully by means of a fixed process?

CHAPTER XIII

BUILDING THE LETTER (*Continued*)

1. *Parts of a letter.*—It is a mistaken idea that the close of a letter is the principal element in its success. The main problem in closing a letter effectively is to know when to stop—that is, when favorable response is assured.

To say that the closing talk in a personal selling canvass is the most important part of the presentation is a generalization which is true of few cases, and presentations ought to be such that it would not be true of any. As a matter of fact, the entire selling canvass should be "closing talk." The opening statements sometimes have much more to do with closing the sale than the final statements. What is said in the body of the talk is all designed to *close* the sale. The mere fact that a few well chosen words happen to precede immediately the closing of the sale, does not signify that those words are necessarily largely responsible for the success of the talk.

Now the sales letter is a written selling talk. Just as it is wise to consider one part of a personal selling talk of as much importance as any other part, so it is best to consider that the opening, the body and

the close of a selling letter have an equal influence in making the letter successful.

These divisions of the letter are merely mechanical conveniences. No general statement should be made to the effect that the most important part of a letter is either the opening or the close. Yet each of the divisions of a letter offers a distinct problem. To insure that the reader will give favorable attention to the rest of the letter is the writer's main problem in the opening, which is often called the "point of contact." As regards the body of the letter, the correspondent's chief concern should be to satisfy, as completely as may be necessary, the reader's desire for facts that will lead him to accept the offer. And in the close of the letter, as mentioned above, the principal point is to know when the reader's acceptance is assured, and to stop neither too soon nor too late.

2. *Point of contact.*—Definite statements of fact, which suggest that, in all probability, it would pay the addressee to read on attentively, are found at the beginning of many successful letters. In some cases these statements are designed also to cause the reader to feel that the writer has the reader's point of view and knows what he is talking about.

Here is the beginning of a letter to druggists that was successful:

> After you have run up front a half-dozen times to sell a couple of stogies, a package of court-plaster and a postage stamp; to change a five-dollar bill for the barber; to answer the 'phone and inform Mrs. Smith that Castoria

is thirty-five cents a bottle; and to assure Mrs. Jones that you will have the doctor call her up as soon as he comes in, then take a minute for yourself and look over this proposition. It is worth while.

This opening paragraph caused the druggist to want to read on. In the first place, there is a touch of good nature which causes the reader to feel that he might get some further enjoyment from finishing the letter. But a busy druggist is not favorably influenced by this so much as by the impression that the writer knows what he is talking about—perhaps, because he has had experience in a drug store.

3. *Credibility in the opening.*—What is said at the beginning of a selling letter must command belief as well as interest. There is a great temptation to make an exaggerated statement of the profit that the reader will derive if only he will read on into the letter and then act upon the suggestions that are made. Lack of credibility only serves to lessen interest.

Openings which begin with "If" seldom get favorable attention. "If" implies doubt, and therefore interferes with belief.

If, from where you are sitting you could lay your hand on the best methods of selling more goods . . .

"If within arm's reach you could have ideas and suggestions based upon the combined experience of 115 prominent sales managers . . . you would value this information highly.

This is the beginning of one letter that attempts to sell a book. It runs on with a long string of "if"

sentences designed to sustain interest, altho the conclusions that complete the conditions are rather obvious. The letter was not successful. Mechanical suspense of that kind seldom arouses interest. The appeal to self-interest is not as strong and direct as is necessary to arouse favorable attention. Buyers like to eliminate all "ifs" before they purchase. They depend on facts. Therefore, it is important that the correspondent convince them that the statements in the sales letter are true and are accurately expressed.

4. *Abrupt openings best.*—While openings that pave the way for a whole-hearted reception of facts are often necessary and effective, yet, as a rule, the opening that immediately wades into an important fact, especially a fact that possesses high "news value" for the addressee, is most likely to get favorable attention; for example:

Dear Sir:

$2,900 FOR ONE BIG AD IN YOUR CITY NEXT SUNDAY.

We're not quitters. War or no war, we're advertising Three-in-One stronger than ever. This is our big business opportunity—and yours.

The letter of which this was the beginning was successful in causing its readers to get ready to take full advantage of a special opportunity to sell more of an advertised product. This introduction commanded favorable attention because it stated a new fact which was closely connected with the reader's chief interest. Or take this case:

Dear Sir:

Prices on the new Forest Park Addition will be advanced ten per cent at noon on October the tenth. The present schedule of prices holds good only until that time.

This is another illustration of the beginning of a successful letter—an abrupt beginning that states a fact of considerable interest to the addressee. The letter was designed especially for prospective purchasers who were on the point of buying. The rest of the letter tells why the prices are being advanced. But the reader is not urged to "buy before the prices go up," lest he be made to feel that the main cause of advancing the price is to force him to buy. The fact that the lots are worth more money than formerly is emphasized. In short, the advancement in price sheds a new light for the prospect on the advantages of these lots.

5. *Indirect opening.*—The abrupt news-fact opening is the easiest type to write, for it implies that the writer has a message that will be of interest to the reader. But in a follow-up series of letters, for instance, when the addressee has apparently paid no attention whatever to several preceding letters, it is often necessary to use an opening that is only indirectly and in small degree related to the actual business of the letter.

If a drygoods merchant in a small town had not responded to several sales letters recently received from the writer of this one, how would a letter like the following impress him?

Dear Sir:

If you aren't too busy, "suppose" with me for three minutes. If you can't do it now, shove this back on your desk until you can.

Suppose, first, a new family moved into your community—a family that you *knew* would be desirable customers, a family whose trade you *knew* you could hold, once you got it started.

Suppose, next, you met the head of that family, and as courteously and tactfully as you could, you spoke of your store, your goods, and your desire to show him that you deserved his business, and—he turned on his heel without a word to you.

Suppose you met him again, and again you tried to show him from another angle that his trading with you would be to his profit, as well as to yours, and—again he refused to even answer.

Suppose now, you repeated your requests on a dozen different occasions and each time he shut up like a clam—couldn't get a word out of him.

I'll bet you'd be "hoppin' mad." Well, in a way, you're he, and I'm you. I've written you a dozen or more letters and each time, so to speak, you've spun on your heel without even an answer. BUT, here's the difference—I'm not a bit mad, but I'm mighty *curious*.

I've searched our proposition over from A to Izzard trying to find out where it has fallen down in *your* eyes—why it has failed to interest you.

Within the last six months, 682 first-class merchants have ordered from us for the first time. If every single one of them isn't thoroly satisfied, I don't know it, and a kick sent in to this office hits me first.

I am mighty curious to know why we haven't had a trial order from *you*. There is an order card attached. Ask your glove girl what she needs, and let us supply you. That would put us *on trial*.

Or write me where the hitch comes that is keeping your house and ours apart. *Please* don't turn on your heel.

Almost all of this letter is "point of contact." It not only shows appreciation of the reader's point of view, but also gains consideration for the writer's point of view. A big selling point is involved here. We are all inclined to interpret the experience of other people in terms of our own Often, in order to make another person know how we feel about a situation, it is necessary, as in this case, to "bring it home" to our readers by citing a similar case that falls within the reader's experience.

6. *Main problem.*—The main problem of the opening is to arouse interest sufficient to secure favorable attention for the letter. The importance of the opening of a letter, therefore, varies with the amount of interest the reader already has in the subject matter. Often the best opening consists merely in the statement of the fact that is of greatest interest to the reader. Such a fact will stir up questions in the reader's mind and cause him to read on in the hope that these questions will be answered, as in the case of the real estate man's letter which began with a plain, direct statement of the fact that prices would advance. This fact, simple as it was, held greater interest for the reader than anything else in the letter.

If the beginning of a selling letter causes the reader to want to read on, the opening is good. To arouse such a desire is the main problem. It might be best merely to state what the writer has to sell, if the reader's feeling of need for the product or

service were already great. Or it might be best to begin the letter with a convincing forecast of what profit the reader may derive if he reads on.

7. *Body of the letter.*—There is no essential difference between the opening and the body of the letter. If the opening of a letter presents the problem of securing attention by means of direct appeal to the reader's chief interests, the writer's problem in the body of the letter is to sustain interest by answering as satisfactorily as possible those questions that are most likely to occur to the addressee as he reads. The difficulty of this task also depends upon the degree of desire for the product or service that the prospective buyer already has.

Nearly always both the competition of other sellers of a product or service, and competition of other possible uses for the buyer's money, make it necessary that the seller exercise considerable salesmanship if he is to be successful. The strength of these two kinds of competition determines the quality of salesmanship required in the writing of a successful letter, and since conditions vary decidedly with different cases, it is impossible to give any fixed formula for the contents of the body of a letter.

The following letter illustrates principles already discussed. Imagine, as you read it, that you are the buyer of paper for a printing company.

Dear Sir:

You know paper just as well as we do, so we won't talk quality.

We just want to ask you one question. How can you afford to ignore Benjamin Bond—like this sheet—at seventeen cents a pound?

You can see that the quality compares *favorably* with bonds costing from fifteen to thirty per cent more.

Try Benjamin Bond on a few orders, and give your customers equal satisfaction at less cost.

A card showing our agents in your vicinity is inclosed. Fill out and mail the blank, and we will send you our sample book showing colors and weights in Benjamin Bond.

Yours very truly,

8. *Why this letter was successful.*—The foregoing letter brought exceptionally good returns. Unless we study it carefully, it does not seem to satisfy the chief interests. It is one of those extraordinary letters which, like many other successful letters, look commonplace.

In the first place, this letter has a remarkably good point of contact. The first paragraph gains immediate interest chiefly because it inspires confidence. Any buyer prefers to deal with the salesman who is willing to rest his case on fact-evidence, the truth of which the buyer can determine *for himself*. This opening appeals strongly to a buyer's desire for complete independence in making his decisions. He is eager to learn the offer of a man who appreciates *his* point of view to this extent. His curiosity is satisfied in the next paragraph, which he reads with double satisfaction because of the favorable attention created by the first paragraph.

The beginning of the second paragraph "We just want to ask you," sounds very natural and serves to

give the reader an impression of sincerity. Therefore, if he had any suspicion of flattery as a result of the first paragraph, he would be inclined to forget it after he had read the rest of the letter.

Then, the stating of the offer in the form of a question, "How can you afford to ignore Benjamin Bond?" and so on, probably would cause the reader to test the paper in his hands and would tend to stimulate *sympathetic* interest. The reader would very likely question himself, "Well, I wonder why I never used this paper?" The word "sympathetic," is emphasized because the reader, under the circumstances, really wants his test of the paper to prove satisfactory, for two reasons: he likes this writer's attitude and apparent sincerity, and he is always in the market to get the most for his money.

This chief interest—to get the most value for his money—is appealed to in the next paragraph. His next thought would probably be, "But I'm not sure that this paper is as good in quality as other paper which costs from fifteen to thirty per cent more." But the advice, "Try Benjamin Bond on a few orders and give your customers equal satisfaction at less cost," completely clears away any doubt he might have on this point. The opinion implied in this remark is consistent with the attitude expressed in the first paragraph. Also, it gives the prospective buyer a picture of customers as well satisfied at less cost to him; or, in case his competition for business is strong, this part of the letter makes him realize that he will

be able to satisfy his customers just as well as before and at less cost to them. This is true of a great many letters that do not seem effective to a critic who does not appreciate the reader's viewpoint.

The reader's next interest could probably be expressed by the question, "How can I try this out?" This is answered by means of a plain statement, which is a good close notwithstanding the fact that it apparently shows no effort on the writer's part to sell. It is nevertheless quite in accord with the attitude of the entire letter. This writer knew when to stop. The letter is complete. The seller wished any action that the prospect might take to be voluntary. Note also that the comparatively low price is mentioned in a way that emphasizes the good quality of the paper. This is another virtue of the question in the second paragraph—it tends to influence the reader to make a favorable, but voluntary decision. But the main point to emphasize in the letter as a whole is that it is written so skilfully that the questions are answered which the addressee will undoubtedly ask as he reads.

9. *Belief.*—If interest is the heart of a successful selling letter, credibility is its soul. Nearly all successful letters are so direct and sincere, so obviously frank and honest, that the reader is inclined to accept without question the truth of *all* the statements. The word "all" is emphasized because even one unconvincing statement in a letter is likely to shake the reader's confidence in other statements.

I hope nobody will ever again send me a whole set of books like these. For four days it has been impossible to get anything done about the house. Nobody will come to meals or go to bed or do anything but read ——.

That was the beginning of a letter designed to sell a set of books. It was sent to a large list of persons including many business men, who are quick to sense statements that do not ring true. The opening is good, and if the paragraph which followed had not attempted to represent this testimonial letter as describing the typical experience of many other purchasers, the lack of credibility would not be as great as it actually was. The next paragraph reads:

The above letter came from Superintendent of Schools, —— ——, of ——, Wisconsin. There is a whole file-case full of similar messages from —— subscribers, who now number 105,000.

In this paragraph "100,000" had been changed with red ink to read "105,000." The idea, perhaps, was to make the number seem more exact. However, this artifice, no matter how correct the figure might be, tends to arouse doubt. Elsewhere in this letter the typed figure 105,000 appeared, and this fact dispels the thought that possibly 5,000 subscribers might have been added since the letter was printed.

10. *Authority.*—No matter how true the statements in a letter may be, the reader will not have much confidence in them if he feels that the writer is not well informed on the subject that he is discussing. It is usually advisable to cause the reader,

early in the letter, to feel that the writer is speaking with authority. The following letter is successful in this respect, and it also illustrates several other important considerations in making a letter credible. It was sent in response to inquiries thru an advertisement.

Here is the color-card and premium list you asked me to send. Let me briefly explain why I am able to give you your choice of premiums as valuable as these.

You will remember I said in my advertisement that I was getting up a list of premiums that would range in value all the way from forty cents up to $11.75. Here they are. Study them carefully. I have tried to pick things that I would have liked to see in such a list when I was out on the farm. I believe that every one of these premiums is of practical value to the farmer. And you may have your choice of them, as explained on the list, with your first order of —— Paint, or of my barn paint, or of both if you will paint both your barn and house.

Why do I supply my paint direct to you at wholesale prices, instead of to the dealers who buy larger quantities at the same price, and *also give* you a valuable premium in the bargain for your first order? Here is exactly the reason, or, I should say, the reasons, for I have several of them.

In the first place, it is really not sold. I must wait for the retailer to sell it to the user before I can ship the dealer a new supply. I am dependent on him—and I am too much of a farmer to be dependent on anybody.

Then, too, the dealer usually carries several brands of paint, and, naturally, he pushes the sales on the brand that pays him the biggest profit. And the brand on which he makes a long profit is not a guaranteed brand of long-wearing paint, like —— Paint. Therefore, as a rule, the dealer does not push the sale of his best brand of paint. I don't blame him for that. You or I might do the same thing in his place. We all like to get as much profit as we can.

That is what we are in the business for. You are farming for the profit you can get out of the land. And I frankly confess that I am making and selling paint for the profit there is in it. I would be three kinds of a chump if I should sell paint for the fun of it. And I should be a bigger chump if I should try to make you think that I am going to all the trouble of making and selling the highest grade of paint just to keep myself out of mischief.

I am in business, just like you or any other business man, for profit. That is exactly why I adopted my new policy—from paint maker to farm-painter—because I thoroly believe that I can sell much more paint direct to thousands of farmers than I could to hundreds of dealers, at the same price and at less expense. I will get a bigger volume of sales at less cost when I sell direct to you.

You no doubt know something about what it costs to keep a bunch of traveling men on the road. They can see only a few dealers as compared with the thousands of farmers I can talk to by mail for several postage stamps. Uncle Sam is my salesman. I know that he will make good for me because my plan of selling direct to users does save money for you. It gives you the chance to buy the very highest grade of paint at a saving of at least fifty cents on each gallon.

Your lawyer will tell you that there are no loopholes for me in this guarantee. This kind of a guarantee can seldom be given by the retailer. It must come direct from the manufacturer, legally made out like the "guaranty" across the page, and this makes a lot of bother for the dealer when negotiated thru him. This is another reason why I prefer to sell direct to you: a legally guaranteed paint like —— is a lot of bother for the dealer, so naturally he would not push it like other brands. That guarantee means much to you. With it you are dead sure that —— Paint will laugh at the winter storms and the hot summer sun for at least five years, that it will not peel off or crack or blister—that it will give your house a substantial appearance, alongside of which a house with cheap paint would be a sad contrast. In fact, I am willing to match up a five-year-old coat of —— Paint with any one-

year-old-coat of any other paint that costs the same price.

You get a good two-dollar paint for $1.45 a gallon, and you get a valuable premium with your first order. These premiums cut deep into my profit, but I am glad to give you your choice of them, as explained on the list, because I know your first order will not be your last. A self-addressed envelop with an order blank in it is inclosed with this letter. Pick out the color or colors and jot down your order on the blank right now, put the order blank back into the addressed envelop, and then mail it to me.

Let me thank you for reading this long letter. I meant to make it long because I want you to fully understand my proposition. I want to supply the paint you need. I want your first order strong enough to give you a big share of my profit in the shape of premiums. Just figure up the total saving of money you will keep in your pocket by getting your paint direct from the maker. Then make out your order. Be sure to tell me what premium you want.

Your very truly,

P. S.—Remember I said in my advertisement I pay the freight.

11. *Convincing presentation.*—This letter sounds authoritative to the farmer partly because he soon finds out that the writer knows the farm from experience. Authority of this kind is most convincing, when it is not obviously dragged in for this purpose. The style of presentation all thru this letter is convincing. It has a frank "you-and-I" tone, which is not overdone. Farmers, like other classes, are keen to suspect letters that are too familiar and agreeable. They like to have a letter get right down to business from the start. That is what this one does, and at the same time, the presentation sounds as if the writer were enthusiastically *talking* to the farmer.

Several other definite touches in this letter gain confidence. "I meant to make it long," in the last paragraph, for example. This plainly shows the thoro frankness of the writer. "I am in business, just like you or any other business man, for profit." In the sixth paragraph is a similar touch of genuineness. If the writer had said, any other "good business man" the expression would not have been quite as convincing.

In the fifth paragraph, "You or I might do the same thing in his place," is another confession that gains confidence and at the same time avoids severe criticism of the local dealers for not pushing the sale of their best brands of paint, without lessening the effect of the selling point the writer is making. He is *openly* competing with the local dealer, and he does not beat around the bush. Evident fearlessness is always convincing because it is closely related to honesty in human nature.

12. *Unity of purpose.*—This letter was successful largely because of its convincing presentation; and it is convincing, in greater measure, because its purpose is unified. That is, it attempts to make two definite impressions, and only two; namely, that this paint is reliable in quality, and that the price is low enough to make a difference in cost sufficient to pay the farmer for his trouble in dealing with a house at a distance. The plan of the letter is good. A lower price would increase the difficulty of convincing the farmer that the quality is high. The premium offer

takes care of that possible difficulty, and at the same time has the advantage of enlisting the help of the farmer's strong desire for one of the premiums. He could find in this list of premiums at least one item which he needed at the time. Inasmuch as painting is something that may be put off indefinitely, the wisdom of this premium plan is apparent.

13. *Pitfalls in closing.*—Evident desire for an immediate response, too great enthusiasm, too argumentative a summary, failure to give definite directions, unwillingness to let the reader voluntarily decide and act, not knowing when to stop, lack of a straightforward request—these are some of the pitfalls at the close of a letter, into which the unwary correspondent is liable to fall.

While it is best to avoid the more intense type of closing exhortations, like the "brass-band" climax, it is also best to avoid the kind of close that dies out in soft undertones. When the good salesman finishes his presentation, he gets away as soon as he can with good grace. The following is the close of a letter that sold gas engines:

> Send back this engine at our expense if it is not *better* than we claim. You would be inclined to doubt mere *statements* of *all* its merits. But you will believe us when you *use* it. There is your pen and here is the order-blank ready for your signature.

It has snap, makes a concrete suggestion, is short and it states effectively and well what is really hard to say without exaggeration. This kind of close is

both credible and conducive to action. Contrast it with a close of this type:

Trusting that we may have your order by return mail, and hoping that we may have the pleasure of numbering you among our permanent customers, we beg to remain,

While it is true that the close should be made strong and convincing, it is well to keep in mind the fact that the opening, the body, and the close are mechanical divisions, that the letter is a unit, and that the writer should build up his effect consecutively from the beginning. In other words, the correspondent should not leave too much to be accomplished in the close; in that part he should plan merely to place a final emphasis upon what he has said in the opening and the body of his letter—and keep out of the pitfalls mentioned above.

REVIEW

Is one part of a letter more important than another?

What is the fundamental purpose of the opening? Why are "abrupt" openings usually best? When are "indirect" openings desirable?

What common requirements knit together the opening and the body of the letter?

What is the connection between credibility and authority?

What constitutes convincing presentation?

What are the more common pitfalls which the close of letters are likely to present?

CHAPTER XIV

FINDING AND FOLLOWING LEADS

1. *"Quality" of the lead.*—A majority of the sales letters that succeed are written to follow leads of good "quality." By the term "quality" is meant the degree of ease, or the degree of difficulty, with which the lead can be turned into a sale. This degree is fixed to a large extent by conditions beyond the correspondent's control, which are, in many cases, largely responsible for the success of the letter. On the other hand, the degree of ease with which a lead can be turned into a sale can sometimes be increased by the correspondent. Often the writer's haste in attempting to win against competition leads him to write a letter designed to close a sale before he has sufficient information about his addressee to enable him to make his letter apply definitely to the exact requirements of the case, whereas he should have written either to find out the "quality" of his lead, or if he already knew that, to improve it.

2. *Over-eagerness to get an order.*—It is the writer's duty to know or to find out the exact need of his addressee. If he receives a request for prices on paper, for example, it is best for him to make sure that he knows definitely what use will be made of the

paper and what kind of paper in his stock will best serve this use. It is often advisable for him to request more definite information than the prospect's first letter gives him, rather than to attempt to get an order immediately. Such a request gives the average reader an impression of good salesmanship, especially if the letter asks specific questions that are easy for the prospect to answer. A request of this kind is proof of the fact that the writer is eager to sell exactly what is wanted. Sometimes, of course, a correspondent can offer a choice of several kinds or qualities of product; but it is advisable, when possible, to concentrate all one's efforts in an attempt to sell only the *one* thing that will best meet the need of the addressee. Therefore, the inquiry preceding the letter that attempts to close the sale, while it is often the longest way 'round, is perhaps the shortest and safest road to the sale. Over-eagerness to sell seldom pays.

3. *Form letters that find leads.*—When form letters are sent to a large number of persons, even if all of them are prospective purchasers, it is often wise to attempt to get a response that will indicate live interest, rather than to try to get the order itself. Asking for an order too soon is often as ineffective as not asking for it at all.

This securing of an expression of interest is one of the most important considerations in planning a series of follow-up letters that are successfully designed to get some kind of response. True, in the first letter in the series, as well as in all the others,

the correspondent ought to do as much as he can to close the sale. But it is doubtful whether it is effective to make one point in one letter and another point in another letter, and then attempt to close by means of a third letter.

When the third letter, or any later letter in a series, "pulls" better than the rest, its superior influence is seldom due to the fact that two or more letters preceded it, but rather to the fact that this third letter was designed to *find a lead* rather than to close a sale. Often its effectiveness is due to this less ambitious purpose, and in most cases it would pull just as well, often better, if it were sent out as the first letter.

4. *Getting a voluntary expression of interest.*— The foregoing principle is illustrated by the case of a certain correspondent who sells power-pumps to contractors. He found that a letter which opened with his best selling point and said nothing about the fact that he had heard that the contractor was in the market for a power-pump, got better returns than a letter in which he began, "I was informed that you are now in the market for a power pump," and then went on to try to sell his pump. His more successful letter ended "If at any time you should be in the market for a power-pump just check and mail the inclosed card and we will quote you a price that will talk louder than words."

The successful letter was short and was a form, but it was varied to fit each case as nearly as possible;

no attempt was made, however, to make it seem anything but a form letter. The purpose was to get a voluntary expression of interest. The questions on the return card were easy to answer, and yet they served to give this company important additional information.

Not only did this letter bring more replies than the other, but it made it easier to sell—either by means of personal selling efforts or by mail—to those who responded. The writer of this letter made the most of the fact that a buyer is inclined to be less responsive when he knows that the seller is acquainted with his need—unless he himself has informed the seller concerning his need.

5. *When to ask for the order.*—The effectiveness of the letter just mentioned was due largely to the fact that it did not ask for an order prematurely, nor did it suggest that a response would be the signal for an avalanche of solicitations to land the business. Its one aim was to make the prospect really want this pump. Centering effort on arousing intense desire is the best method to secure the order. But in many cases, when competition for the business is most keen, the writer feels that there is no time to spare and he asks for the business too soon. Time and again in cases of keen competition, the salesman who gets the order is the one who holds back until he finds out all about the conditions, who does not rush in with the crowd to close the sale, but waits until he can better show the prospect how his product fits the conditions.

6. *Description that sells goods.*—What the inquirer wants, as a rule, is information, not sales arguments. The follow-up letter which shows that the writer is eager to supply all the information that the prospect needs in order to make up his mind independently of a salesman's persuasion, is the kind of letter that many find to be most successful. It gives facts about the goods and about the use of them, rather than opinions or conclusions. Its descriptions of the goods or services in which the reader is interested are its greatest selling asset. These descriptions are nearly always concrete and concise, and they always are hooked up with the reader's interest. The following letter is a good example:

Dear Sir:

In the envelop attached to this letter is an illustrated description of our gas engine for irrigating.

You see all its parts are in plain view and easy to get at. You won't need to send to the factory for a special man with a special wrench to do the work when a nut or some other part needs tightening.

Sparkers sometimes get gummed up, but it is not any trouble at all to take out this sparker. Simply remove two nuts, and out comes the sparker complete. Wipe the point off with a rag, put the sparker back in place, and presto! You see the inventor of this machine had a good many years of practical experience in installing gasolene engines before he started to manufacture his own.

And the governor! It is the same type as that used on the highest grade of steam engine, allowing you to speed her up or slow her down while the engine is running. Few engines are built like this. It costs us a good deal of extra money, but it does give you a lot of extra satisfaction.

This is the beginning of a two-page letter all of which is devoted to description of this kind—the kind that keeps the reader in the picture. In this case, advantage was taken of the permission the postal authorities gave to paste a letter in a separate envelop bearing first-class postage on the outside of a larger envelop containing the printed matter and bearing fourth-class postage. The opening paragraph of the letter refers the reader to the printed matter. This method made it certain that the catalog would reach the prospect at the same time that he got the letter.

7. *Letters accompanying sales literature.*—What the letter should be which accompanies the catalog or booklet, depends, of course, on the conditions peculiar to each case. If the booklet or catalog is long, and if only parts of it are of immediate interest to the addressee, the letter can be used to call attention to those parts. In some cases it pays to mark with a blue pencil the parts of the catalog which are of greatest immediate interest to the reader. In general, the purpose of the letter should be to arouse interest in the printed material.

A clothing manufacturer who has had a great deal of success with letters, prepared a booklet for consumers the object of which was to help solve the problem of getting the dealers to take the consumers' attitude toward this line of clothes. It was the task of the letter to get the dealer to read a booklet written for the consumer. This was accomplished by frankly

explaining why it would be desirable for a dealer to put himself in the consumer's place and read the booklet just as if he were Mr. John Colby, the grocery clerk, who wanted to get the best Sunday suit of clothes he could buy for about $15. Here is the letter:

Dear Mr. Jackson:

Your success in business is due to the same fundamental cause that has made success for us.

You and we both know that our success is due to the fact that our customer's viewpoint molds our policies. Your policies and ours are sound or unsound according to whether or not they are shaped by someone who thoroly understands the customer's point of view.

Now we know you haven't much time for reading. But anything that will help either of us better to understand our business from the customer's point of view is worth taking time for. You helped us write the inclosed Style Book. It is better than previous style books because it is written more from the consumer's point of view. We get much of our information about the consumer thru you. Would this booklet interest your trade?

Will you do something for me? Won't you sit down at home tonight and imagine you are Mr. John Colby, the groceryman, and not Mr. H. V. Jackson, the clothing man, and read this booklet *from the groceryman's point of view.* Pay particular attention to the parts we have marked with a blue pencil. Do this tonight or today. Will you? Another letter from us will reach you tomorrow. But you won't appreciate it unless you have first read this booklet *from your customer's point of view.*

Will write you again tomorrow.

Sincerely yours,

Sales Manager.

The next morning the merchant received this letter:

Dear Mr. Jackson:

Good morning. How did the style book impress Mr. Colby, the groceryman? It will be likely to make the same hit with all prospective customers to whom you send it.

How many do you want for your town and vicinity? If you will send me the names and addresses on the inclosed sheets, *or* if you will lend me a copy of your local telephone book, having first crossed off the names of those to whom you do not want these style books to go, we'll address and *stamp* the envelops and send the Style Books to you by express, all ready to mail in your town when you want them to go out—and it will cost you only the penny for postage on each style book.

If you have last year's list on hand, check it up and send it with any additions you care to make; or send a copy of the telephone book, or any other list of names, with the names crossed off to whom you do not care to send the Style Book.

We'll send the addressed and stamped booklets to you *within* two weeks after your list reaches us.

Why did I wait until today to ask for your list of names? Because I wanted to give you a fair chance to size up the value of this book from the consumer's point of view, so that you would send *more* names and send them soon, or tell us how many books you can use. Better send the list. It's less bother for you.

Cordially yours,
Sales Manager.

8. *Why these letters were successful.*—The letters quoted above were successful in accomplishing their two purposes: to cause the merchant to read a consumer's booklet with interest, and to get him to send this booklet to a *revised* list of names. Mr. Colby,

the groceryman, is a real personage, a man in this town, selected by the advertising department as a typical consumer of the brand of clothes put out by this manufacturer. The names of typical consumers were gathered in each town for another purpose, but they served well to inject into these letters a personal element that was more convincing than merely the imitation of it, which comes from the use of personal phraseology of the sort that is often employed in an attempt to make form letters appear to be personal letters to individuals.

These letters also illustrate the kind of foresight which is based on experience, and which marks nearly all successful letters. In previous years the merchants had delayed to send in either new lists of names or revisions of old lists, for several reasons. In the first place, the request for them was made in a commonplace manner; then, too, no definite instructions were given as to how to prepare the lists, and no choice of methods of sending in the names was offered.

In this case the merchant was "sold" on the consumer's booklet. The manufacturer induced the merchant to read this booklet *from the consumer's viewpoint* by taking advantage of a successful method of selling to merchants which is used principally by personal salesmen. This method consists in calling up in the merchant's mind a picture of himself selling to his own customers the goods that the manufacturer wants him to buy.

9. *Inclosures.*—Whether a letter, accompanied by printed matter, is sent to one person or is sent out as a "form" to many persons, it is to the letter itself that the most importance attaches. Those houses that get the best results from sales letters recognize this fact and compose the letter accordingly. Only such printed matter is inclosed as is *necessary* to supplement the letter.

Unfortunately, form letters are looked upon with disfavor by nearly all buyers, including consumers. This antagonistic feeling, however, is gradually becoming less intense because the practice of thoro classification of mailing lists is becoming more universal. In other words, fewer attempts are being made to make the form letter seem to be written to an individual, and fewer of these form letters are going to people outside the class which they are intended to reach.

Now and then a retail mail-order concern can stuff a letter with a lot of miscellaneous special offers that are set forth on separate leaflets. When this method is found to pay, it should, of course, be used. But, as a rule, inclosures which do not have a direct bearing on the subject matter of the letter that they accompany, serve only to distract attention from the main issue. The main question concerning inclosures, then, is, "How few (rather than how many) is it possible to use?"

10. *What inclosures are necessary?*—The success of a letter often depends upon the decision that is

made as to what printed matter constitutes a necessary supplement to the letter itself. This supplementary printed matter is especially important when it is of such a nature that it influences the reader to act. The order blank serves this purpose; so does the printed sheet of information that gives the reader facts on which to base his decision in regard to the offer. When a favorable decision would involve selecting one of several products, the letter is often designed to help the reader make this selection. In such a case it is good salesmanship to include printed matter relating to all the products.

11. *Arrangement of inclosures.*—When several inclosures are used, they often may be so folded and arranged that the letter will be read first, and then the inclosures in the order in which the writer prefers to have them read. It is often advantageous to have the inclosures the same size as the letter paper.

One of the characteristics of the successful sales correspondent is carefulness in the handling of details. For example, the successful writer will clip inclosures to the *back* of the letter, and not stuff them in without regard to arrangement. His letter usually creates interest in these inclosures, but the letter is complete in itself, so that his addressee reads it thru before he gives his attention to the supplementary printed matter. It is clear that such a letter must arouse the reader's interest at the very beginning, and hold it to the very end; consequently, it must often include the salient points which are again presented

in greater detail in the supplementary printed matter.

12. *Meeting a difficult situation.*—The following letter shows how a successful real estate man overcame some very common "resistances." The "literature" inclosed with this letter consisted of another letter which cited the experience of investors in real estate at Gary, Indiana, when the Steel Corporation began to develop that city as a town site. The inclosure also called attention to a new town site that was being laid out by the same corporation, and stated that detailed information about the building lots which were for sale would be sent if the reader would indicate interest by returning the mailing card. There was also inclosed a large sheet (size 21 x 28 inches) of pictures of the work then being done by the Steel Corporation by way of preparing this town site for habitation. Interesting captions explained these pictures. This mailing was a success, largely because of the preliminary letter with the words, "Read This First," boldly penned at the top of it. This letter follows:

READ THIS FIRST:

I know you are molested every day with fortune-promising literature, and advice as to how to invest your money and be among the millionaires.

You know your business—I know mine—and for this reason I ask that any half-hour when you have nothing to do you read thru the other printed matter inclosed herein, and if you find anything that interests you, mail me the post card and I will send you full particulars.

Don't say that you haven't any money.
Don't think that you are not interested because the proposed investment is away from where you are now doing your business.

13. *Mail and personal sales cooperation.*—Finding and following leads by means of letters that are a result of the correspondence department's cooperation with the personal salesmen, is a practice which has long been widespread, but which, nevertheless, is just beginning to be given the amount of attention that the results warrant. Sales managers and salesmen in many lines of business are coming to realize that the efforts which immediately effect a sale would many times be unsuccessful were it not for various other selling forces more or less distantly related, in both time and place, to the sale. Nearly all sales are the result of a combination of selling forces.

The increasing tendency to coordinate all available selling methods is giving the letter a place of increasing importance, along with advertising, as a means whereby to pave the approach and reinforce the visit of the personal salesman. Personal salesmen are readily led to appreciate what the results may be if this kind of cooperation is planned and executed as carefully and completely as its possibilities warrant. Letters written by the personal salesman himself, or by a man who keeps in close touch with him, are most likely to be successful.

Many concerns are now working all territories thru the agency of two men; one is placed in charge

of personal sales; the other is held responsible for mail orders. Each man, however, shares with the other the responsibility for the total sales record in the territory. The traveling salesman "pulls" for the man at the office, gives him data for effective letters, plans letter campaigns with him—in short, gives the correspondent the kind of cooperation necessary for success; and the correspondent, by keeping in touch with prospects and old customers, supplements the salesman's efforts most effectively.

The correspondents are frequently chosen from among men who have had training as salesmen. Even when the correspondent's chief duty is to get sales in the smaller communities, where it would not pay to send a traveling salesman, cooperation between him and the man, or men, on the road is decidedly desirable.

14. *Function of advance letters.*—Letters that are sent before the salesman makes his visit may serve any one of several purposes. They may merely give advance notice of the salesman's visit, or they may constitute an extensive educational campaign which will thoroly inform the prospect concerning the proposition, and so enable the salesman to concentrate on closing the sale. Or they may—and often do—save the salesman's time by eliminating poor prospects and finding good ones. But this method of locating good prospects in a town, prior to the salesman's visit, is one that involves the necessity of a thoro plan, for there is considerable risk in carry-

ing it out. Letters often fail to get a response from men who could easily be sold by a personal canvass. On the other hand, salesmen in many specialty lines could not possibly follow the line of least resistance without the help of letters if the correspondence department did not seek out the live prospects for them.

It is seldom effective to attempt to solicit by mail a request from the prospect for a personal call from the salesman. Such requests are desirable, but they are very difficult to get. Rather than try to secure them, it is better, as a rule, to offer some special inducement that will bring a response from all who are likely to be interested. Then, it may be advisable in many cases, to send additional mail pieces or letters to these people with the idea of retaining their interest until the salesman can call. If any of these prospective buyers express further interest in response to these letters, the salesman may call on them first of all when he reaches their town. If he sells these prospects—the first that he visits in the community—he will be encouraged to work harder than ever, and probably will accomplish much, for "nothing succeeds like success."

15. *Follow-up letters.*—Altho it is best to make the first letter in a series of follow-up letters do as much as possible toward accomplishing the sale, there is a certain advantage in sending a number of letters which makes the follow-up system profitable in many cases. This advantage is the power of repeti-

tion to cause belief. "If they are so confident that I ought to be interested that they will send me all these letters, perhaps, after all, they're right and I'd better see what they have to offer" is the reasoning that represents a common reaction to persistency in sending out follow-up letters when the letters go to a lead of fairly good "quality."

Thus, even if the first letters are not read, attention may be given to the third or fourth or fifth—or the tenth letter in a series, if the selling budget warrants sending as many as ten letters. Each letter, however—no matter how many are sent—ought to be self-sufficient.

It is often best to present the same fundamental selling points in each letter, but from a different point of view in every one. It is most effective to make the difference in viewpoint evident in the opening paragraphs, for in a majority of cases letters that fail are not read thru.

"My letter of the 21st ult. brought no reply from you, but it did bring us a large number of stock orders" was the beginning of a follow-up letter that failed to get a single response from 1,200 persons. The second paragraph read as follows:

> I know that some orders are hard to get by mail. I wish I had the time to call on you, because I believe that within a few minutes I could convince you that our goods and prices are right. With our automatic machinery we can beat anybody else's prices, as I explained fully in my first letter.

The next paragraph asked for the reason why the first letter was not answered, and promised the prospect a desk calendar, on the condition that he accept the seller's proposition. "It is FREE. All I want you to do is write me." That was the close of this follow-up letter, the writer of which took it for granted that the first letter had not only been read, but remembered. Now this man's third letter was the same as the first, except for the opening, and it was successful. It did not mention preceding letters, but it began like this: "Eyelets? Yes! How's this one at the price?" The sample eyelet—attached to the paper—and its price and specifications, came next. Then, "How can we do it? Listen." The writer went on from this point to talk convincingly about automatic machinery. Instead of offering to send a calendar free provided the addressee responded favorably, he inclosed a *stamped* envelop containing three other small envelops, in which the prospect might send back, labeled, samples of any kind of eyelets on which he wished to have prices quoted.

As a rule, the same *fundamental* selling points will sell to nearly all buyers; but the big problem is to get the "readers" to read. To solve this problem it is essential to present the proposition differently to different types of buyers. When a list of names has been classified as accurately as possible, and yet it is known that the classification is not entirely adequate, it is sometimes advisable to adapt each letter in a follow-up series to one of the different classes.

16. *Letters that aid in effecting the sale.*—Letters designed to consummate a sale are not used now as much as formerly in many lines. The tendency seems to be to use general big lists of names, except when a letter can be employed successfully to find out who are the live prospects in the list. The letter secures a response rather than an order—a response that will permit the letter-writer to send selling letters in which he can take advantage of *individual* differences in addressees. The use of letters that find and follow individual leads is growing rapidly in many lines of business.

This is a good tendency. Fewer unsuccessful letters are being sent out. Consequently the respect of most people for the sales letter is increasing. More letters are sent to the individual. Fewer merely pretend to be so written, because the public in general, and especially the business public, is beginning to take considerable interest in business correspondence as one of the more important methods of competition, and therefore sincere personal worth receives more emphasis than formerly.

Sales letters are at their best when they are designed to find or follow definite leads, usually in cooperation with other means of selling.

REVIEW

Explain how the correspondent can influence the "quality" of a lead.

Why is it desirable to get voluntary expression of interest?

What is the best way in which to ask for the order?

What is the best kind of description?

Discuss the relation between the letter and inclosures.

Why is cooperation between the correspondence department and the personal selling force necessary?

What is the function of "advance" letters?

What are two basic reasons for the use of follow-up letters?

In general, what type of selling letter is most effective, and why?

CHAPTER XV

SYSTEMS

1. *Handling the mail.*—Methods of handling incoming mail vary according to the size of the business. In general, the aim is to develop a system which will promote dispatch and thoroness. Many large concerns have the date and hour of arrival stamped on each incoming letter, and require that all letters be handled within a definite number of hours after arrival. Small concerns also find this to be a good system. Letters that are hard to handle very often represent cases that ought to be managed with dispatch; but there is constant temptation to hold over hard letters until other and easier matters have been attended to. Each case should be handled in the order in which it comes up; in this way correspondents attend to the difficult cases as they arise.

A great deal of business is lost each year thru the failure to handle difficult cases promptly. For example, a customer who lived out of town returned to the adjustment department of a certain department store a suit of clothes he had purchased, and claimed a refund. His reason for wanting the refund was not that he thought the department store could not sat-

isfy him with some other suit, but that he could not get to the city again for several months and could not wait that long to get another suit. In his letter he explained what was wrong with the clothes and stated that he was buying another suit in his home town. It happened that alterations had been made on this suit at the time it was purchased; these, the addressee said, he was willing to pay for.

He received a polite postal card by return mail telling him that the adjustment he asked for would be made as soon as possible. But it was not until a month later that the refund was sent—and before that time the customer had sent two more letters asking for it. He did not get a reply to either of his letters. When the refund was finally sent to him a letter of apology accompanied it. But the apology was too late. The customer had resolved never again to buy from that department store, and his purchases had averaged $150 a year for several years.

A system which insures promptness in the handling of all mail is most highly desirable. When it is necessary for the correspondent to get information and advice from others in the organization, the messenger boy service is often found satisfactory. It often pays to have the messenger wait for the required O. K. or information. The mail-carrier system within the office or house, regulated by hourly or half-hourly collections and deliveries, helps greatly in solving the problem of quick interdepartmental communication when the telephone cannot be used.

2. *Assorting the mail.*—Many large business houses are finding that it pays well to have as assorters of mail those men who are able to determine not only where each letter ought to go, but also how the case should be handled. These assorters themselves handle from ten to twenty per cent of the correspondence. That is, they indicate by notations attached to the letter what disposition is to be made of the case, so that a well trained typist-correspondent can make the reply. In many instances, these expert assorters also know when a letter must go to more than one member of the organization before it can be answered, and they route letters accordingly. The result is that as soon as the man who is to write the answer gets the letter and reads it he has all the information necessary for immediate dictation. In other cases, when long letters come in for officials whose time is worth a great deal, these assorters summarize the letters as they read, or hand them to a professional *précis* writer. Often it is necessary for the high-salaried official merely to read this summary in order to handle the case.

The kind of assorting described in the preceding paragraph is very similar in principle to that done by the executive who, as he goes thru his pile of correspondence, picks out easy letters here and there, jots down at the bottom of each the disposition that is to be made of it, and lets a subordinate write the answer.

3. *Form letters and form paragraphs.*—Many

business concerns can use the form-letter and the form-paragraph system to good advantage. The abuse of this system is responsible for the unwarranted condemnation it has received. One mail-order house in New York City handles efficiently about 90 per cent of all its correspondence by means of form paragraphs.

One often hears: "Our letters could not possibly be written that way. We have to write an individual letter in each case. You can't write an effective letter unless you adapt it to the individual case," and so on. Often, it is true, forms have been tried and "they failed," but in most cases the failure was due to lack of the necessary patience required to create a complete and really efficient set of form letters or paragraphs.

The use of form letters is much more restricted than the use of form paragraphs. A folio of form paragraphs may be useful in writing the bulk of the more difficult types of business letters. But such a folio of paragraphs cannot be created overnight, nor can it be done in a year. Several years are usually required to develop a form-paragraph system to the point where it will enable the firm to take care of a large part of the correspondence completely and adequately. The task of creating an efficient system of form paragraphs is never wholly completed.

4. *When the use of form paragraphs is inadvisable.* —While the failure of the form-paragraph system is usually due to the fact that it is not given a fair trial,

doubtless it would not pay many business houses to take the time and to incur the expense necessary to create an efficient set of form paragraphs. The use of a complete form-paragraph system may not be advisable when the amount of a concern's correspondence is relatively small and there are not many letters of one kind to write; or when the business is of such a kind that each letter must be handled differently from all the rest, especially when the cost of correspondence is a small item in the expense budget in proportion to sales, or to profits, or to the cost of getting or doing business—as it is in a contractor's office, or in a machinery supply house, for instance. Yet there are few offices where form paragraphs could not be used advantageously, at least in a limited way.

5. *When the use of form paragraphs is advisable.* —Of course, the skill and judgment required in making efficient use of form paragraphs is largely dependent upon the completeness and thoroness with which the fund of paragraphs covers the cases. The more efficient the folio of form paragraphs, the easier it is to make effective use of it. In the case of one company, for instance, 400 different paragraphs are prepared. About 200 of these are active. Nearly all the firm's letters are composed from the material in these 200 paragraphs, which are so well prepared that any bright girl can use them to write an effective letter. In order to do this, she has, of course, to memorize, not the wording, but the thought and the purpose of each paragraph. Definiteness and

unity of purpose in each paragraph is naturally of primary importance.

6. *Slip system.*—When form paragraphs are used in connection with dictation to a stenographer —especially when the writer reads form paragraphs as an aid in his dictation—there is not much saving in time and expense, altho such use of form paragraphs may now and then be advisable. But when hundreds of letters are written daily and the expense is an important item, it pays to make direct use of form paragraphs. At least one big concern has succeeded in developing such a complete and efficient stock of form paragraphs that it can use the so-called "slip" system of writing letters. The paragraphs are printed on slips of paper about the size of a half-sheet letterhead. A letter is composed merely by picking the proper slips and clipping them together. So thoro is the development of this system that nearly all the correspondence in this concern is effectively handled by means of it.

The girls that do the "picking"—not the writing—of letters for the concern just mentioned, are careful to retype on new slips the paragraphs that need alteration. So complete is the supply of paragraphs, however, that alterations are necessary only in a slight percentage of cases.

The danger of sending the wrong paragraphs is lessened by examiners. It has been found that less than one-half of one per cent of letters that are picked are inaccurate or incomplete. Each picker addresses

the envelop for each of her letters as well as the envelops for any printed matter that is to go with it. Thus one girl does all the work needed for one letter. This seems to be the highest possible development of the form-paragraph system.

Even if the "slip" system did not result in a better letter, as it does for this concern, the big difference between the cost of a letter produced by this method and that of a typed-from-dictation letter might commend its use, especially to a big house that has a large volume of correspondence.

7. *Knowledge of mailing list.*—The mailing list is the basis of direct advertising. Like the evolution of an efficient form-paragraph system, the development of an efficient mailing list takes time. One man's "mailing-list creed" reads as follows: "Every possible customer not on my list represents a leak in my future profits, and every name on my list which is not that of a possible customer represents a leak in my present advertising expense."

It is decidedly advisable to know a great deal about a list of names before sending out letters and printed matter. One concern requires the correspondent to answer the following set of questions before he circularizes any part of a big general list of prospective purchasers:

What is the origin of the list, especially that part of it to be circularized?
How many names are on it?
What territory does it cover?

How are the names distributed, territorially?
What distinct classes of people does the list include?
What percentage is each class of the total names listed?
What are the chief characteristics of each class?
Should not the appeal to each class differ? If so, how? If not, why not?
What are the chief interests of a typical person in each class?
What are the chief resistances of each class to your proposition?
Is your knowledge of each class accurate?

These questions serve to impress the writer with the fact that he is writing to *individuals in classes* and not merely to a general class of persons. Frequently the writer sees that it is advisable to get out several editions of a letter, each edition especially adapted to one of the classes represented on the list. For example, the International Harvester Company got out three tractor letters to three classes of farmers: Eastern farmers, Western farmers, and Middle-Western farmers. The value of the tractor for use in farming large tracts of land was emphasized in the letter to Western farmers; the variety of uses to which it could be put was emphasized in the letter sent to Eastern farmers, and so on. The "reader's point of view" is the principle underlying this kind of adaptation.

8. *Follow-up systems.*—Mechanical arrangements as an aid in mailing follow-up letters at the right time are well known. For some reason, many concerns decide that their prospects are to be given a ten-day or a twenty-day follow-up, as the case may be, and a com-

plicated scheme is worked out whereby an inquiry received on the fifth of the month, for example, will, without fail, receive a follow-up letter on the fifteenth, twenty-fifth, and so on. One executive who had charge of follow-ups in an office-appliance manufacturing business decided that such a system wasted time. His clerk had to go thru the entire follow-up file every day and pull out the few cards that had the names of those due for follow-up, and then return them to the file. He had to perform this operation every day. In this system no care was exercised concerning the days on which follow-up letters would reach the prospect. And this, notwithstanding the fact that it was advisable to send out mailings the first of the week so that the letters would reach the prospects about Thursday or Friday, not on Saturday, when the man had gone to the country or was doing a day's work in a morning, or on Monday or Tuesday, which are big days for incoming mail of all sorts.

This executive now has an active inquiry file; each person on the list gets a follow-up series of about five different pieces, one each week. On Monday the clerk prepares the follow-up. Every one on the list receives a letter. The list is classified in order that each person may receive the right letter. It is much easier for the clerk to separate the names according to the series, or the number of the letter in the series, than to go completely thru the file every day. All the follow-ups then go out on Tuesday or Wednesday.

After the inquiry is five weeks old and all the follow-ups have been sent, it is transferred to a "pre-

ferred file" and then the person gets a letter adapted to his particular line of business, once every month, or oftener, if the season is ripe for selling to prospects in that line. Proofs of this preferred list are sent every three months to the local agents out in the territories. These agents remove the names of those whom they do not consider immediate prospects, and also add the names of others, to whom they believe circulars should be sent. In the case of open territory, not covered by salesmen, the names are left on the list for one year and are then transferred to the general lists of those who are circularized only during the course of special campaigns.

Between the ordinary "tickler" file, with its thirty-one divisions—one for each day of the month—up to the more complicated card and tab systems, which facilitate follow-up correspondence, there are many variations of follow-up systems designed to meet special needs and conditions. The card system and the plan of filing only a carbon copy of the reply serve to prevent the sending off of follow-ups to those from whom a response is received before the date set for the follow-up. It is always best to use a system that permits quick reference to all previous correspondence. The card system for follow-ups possesses this advantage. The card, with tabs at the top to indicate the date of follow-up, may be filed alphabetically, or in the same way in which correspondence is filed. If the card system is not used, it is advisable to file the correspondence in the regular file and to have only a

carbon of the reply, or a memorandum, in the follow-up file, as already suggested.

9. *Filing systems.*—It is not the aim in this treatment of the systems used in business correspondence to give detailed descriptions. Nearly all the large manufacturers of filing devices get out detailed description of all up-to-date vertical filing and card-indexing systems; this printed matter constitutes part of the selling plans of these concerns. Such sales literature is the most complete and the most reliable source of information concerning filing systems.

One booklet on this subject, published by a manufacturer of filing devices, contains a statement of the principles of vertical filing and describes minutely the various systems of arrangement in filing—alphabetical, geographical, numerical, subject, chronological, and so on. It also contains descriptions of systems for filing invoices, vouchers, clipping, catalogs, price costs, and the like. In addition, there are sections on follow-up systems, attorney's files, card ledgers, salesmen's calls, and the transference of correspondence. A study of the manufacturers' booklets on these subjects is well worth the time of any one who is interested in improving the filing systems in his office.

REVIEW

How may assorters of incoming mail save time and expense in connection with the handling of correspondence?

When can form paragraphs be used with success? What is the main cause of failure in the use of form paragraphs?

Under what conditions can the "slip" system be used successfully?

How can the work of sending out follow-ups be simplified?

CHAPTER XVI

MECHANICAL FORM

1. *Value of good form.*—The effect of the mechanical appearance of a letter is often compared to the effect of the clothes worn by a salesman. This comparison is good, but limited. Salesmen have much more opportunity for the expression of individuality in the choice of their clothes than correspondents have in choosing the mechanical dress of their letters. The principle, however, is the same.

Nearly all people who know what is good form in letter-writing are affected unfavorably by the lack of it in letters that they receive. They expect good form as a matter of course. Correct form, therefore, is not so much a positive asset as it is a precaution. Correctness and attractiveness in the mechanical make-up of the letter ward off the possibility of unfavorable criticism on that score; herein is the chief value of observing the current standards of good form.

Altho the desired effect of a letter in nearly all cases is not gained in any great measure by means of the appearance of the letter, it must not be forgotten that the consummation of the sale may sometimes actually be prevented by the lack of good mechanical form.

2. *Uniformity of mechanical make-up.*—Of equal importance with uniformity of tone in the letters that go out from any one house, is the uniformity of the mechanical make-up. It is desirable to have standardization of good form both with respect to the conventional mechanical requirement, such as spacing, punctuation, indentions, and so on, and with respect to the artistic requirements, such as balance and neatness. If an addressee receives several letters that differ in mechanical make-up, it is likely that he will receive an impression of inconsistency.

As good usage in literary composition is established by the practice of leading authors, so good form in letter-writing is fixed by the practice of the leading business concerns. The following sections include information concerning standards observed in the leading business houses of the country.

3. *Originality and custom.*—The customary mechanical make-up of the business letter is so thoroly established that few business concerns care to take the risk of disregarding it. Refusing to conform to the standard involves the same kind of risk that a salesman takes when he wears a hat or a coat that is out of style or too much in style. He becomes conspicuous; and worse still, his clothes distract attention from his selling talk. Writing the date in an unusual way, the use of colored stationery, the omission of the salutation, odd spacing of the heading or of the address—all such departures from custom involve risk, altho sometimes a variation from the standard may

suggest that the concern is up-to-date, and may therefore command greater attention.

It is a nice question to decide just how much originality should be shown in the mechanical make-up. Safety lies in close adherence to custom. If, however, it seems probable that a form which is original and unusual will eventually be universally employed on account of its utility, it would probably be safe to use it. The non-indentation of the first lines of paragraphs in letters with single spacing—because the double spacing between paragraphs sufficiently separates them—is a case in point. Notwithstanding the fact that many leading business houses have adopted the custom, there is some question as to whether the utility is sufficient to insure universal acceptance.

There is a tendency on the part of many correspondents to reason that what is customary is old, and what is old is not in accordance with modern methods. But even the modern conventionalized make-up of a business letter is necessarily in accordance with utility. This does not mean, of course, that forms must always remain the same. Quite the contrary. For instance, it might be advisable to place the name of the writer, as well as that of the addressee, at the top of the letter—unless the letter-head gives the writer's name—because as a rule the reader wants to know, before he reads it, who wrote the letter. But a change of this kind involves considerable risk on the part of the innovator. Its apparent utility is not sufficient to insure universal accceptance.

4. *The parts of a letter.*—The conventionalized parts of a business letter are the letterhead, or the heading, the address, the salutation, the body, the complimentary close, the signature, and information solely for the convenience of the writer, such as the writer's initials and those of the stenographer in the lower left-hand corner.

When a letterhead is used, the typed heading consists of the date only. When there is no printed letterhead, the typed heading should include full information concerning the address of the writer. It is placed in the upper right-hand corner of the type space. This type space varies in size and shape, in accordance with the principle of balance, with respect to the amount of typed matter to be included on the page. An expert stenographer will always estimate the amount of type space required for a letter before it is written, and then will write it in such a way that the typed matter will be framed by a border of white space of pleasing proportions.

5. *Letterhead.*—A plain letterhead without ornamentation or illustration is preferred by a majority of leading business houses. The purpose of illustrated letterheads is often merely to do "free" advertising, and the effect is likely to be about the same as when a firm sends with a letter "stuffers" bearing printed matter whose subject is unrelated to that of the letter itself. On the other hand, if the illustrated letterhead bears information that makes the message of the letter more complete, or which in any other way

distinctly serves the interests of the addressee, the general objection to the use of illustrations on letterheads may not apply. Nevertheless, a plain letterhead is usually preferable.

If a concern has several branches, it is important that each branch indicate its address on its own letterhead in red ink, or by some kind of distinctive typing. If this is not done, an addressee will often send a letter to the wrong branch. The same thing is true when several names appear on the letterhead and the name of the official who writes the letter is not apparent at a glance.

It is sometimes necessary to include also information concerning terms, the liability of the company in case of strikes, and other notations of a protective nature; but it is best, if possible, to omit material of this kind.

Another matter of considerable importance is the design of the letterhead. It should be appropriate to, and consistent with, the character of the business. As a rule, it ought to be centered at the top of the page, rather than placed off at one side; and its length should seldom be more than about one-fifth that of the page—that is, from an inch and a half to two and a half inches in width. The color of the ink and of the paper used should, of course, harmonize, and it is desirable that the ink used for the letterhead be the same as that of the typewriter ribbon. A combination of white bond paper and black ink is always good. Two-color letterheads are not objectionable

when the colors are complementary, provided the design lends itself to this arrangement. A tinted "shadow" illustration—the trade-mark, or a picture of the building, for instance—over which the letterhead proper is printed, is sometimes effective. The usage of the highest class of business houses, however, favors severe simplicity.

6. *Heading and address.*—The modern tendency to omit all except necessary punctuation in the heading and the address of the letter seems commendable, altho, as yet, comparatively few companies make it a practice to do so. As a matter of fact, punctuation is not more necessary here than it is on the envelop, and it has come to be bad form to use full punctuation in addressing the envelop. It seems probable that the omission of all but necessary punctuation in the heading and the address of a business letter will sooner or later become universal practice. Today, either full or "necessary" punctuation is correct. By necessary punctuation is meant the use of periods in all abbreviations and the use of commas when necessary within the line, not at the end of the line. The following example will illustrate this point:

19 East Jackson Boul.
Chicago, Illinois
Oct. 10, 1916

Mr. Harvey Coolidge
1300 Maple Avenue
Evanston, Ill.
Dear Sir:

Full punctuation, however, is safer until the time when the above form shall become more universal. An example of full punctuation is this:

19 East Jackson Boul.,
Chicago, Illinois,
Oct. 10, 1916.

Mr. Harvey Coolidge,
1300 Maple Avenue,
Evanston, Illinois.
Dear Sir:

It is an almost universal practice to omit the period after the date in the heading.

Both the *eschelon* and the block arrangements of the heading and the address are good. The *eschelon,* or stair-step indention, suggests a little more care, and therefore engenders somewhat more respect for the addressee than the block arrangement, which saves a slight amount of time for the stenographer. The same desire to show respect for the reader by avoiding an appearance of haste causes many to prefer full punctuation for the address and heading.

The name of the month, altho it may be abbreviated, is usually spelled out in full. Writing the date like this, 10/8/16, is obsolete. It suggests haste, takes more time to interpret, and is sometimes misleading because the first two numerals are interchangeably used for the day of the month and the month of the year.

"For the attention of Mr. ——" or "Attention of Mr. ——" is used when it is deemed best to address

the firm and when, at the same time, the writer wants to make sure that a certain individual in the concern will receive the letter. Sometimes the official title is used when the writer does not know the name of the person for whom the letter is meant—"Attention of the Advertising Manager," for example. It is best to place this part of the address just above the salutation, either in the center of the page or at the left-hand margin. In such cases the salutation most appropriate for the *individual* addressed is used. It is best, however, to avoid this general kind of address if possible for it is more effective to use the name of the individual addressee on the first line of the address.

Sometimes the letterhead of a firm addressed will include a request that all letters be addressed to the firm itself. Such requests, however, ought not to be made, nor is it well to ask that the addressee, in answering, mention a file number. Whether or not the concern realizes it, the impression is the same as if the firm asked for a donation to help keep down expenses. In some cases, when the initials of the individual addressee are not known and are not available, or when there is doubt as to what they are, it is best to use this form: "Attention of Mr. ——." The omission of the initials is not then so noticeable as it otherwise would be.

7. *Titles.*—It pays to be careful in the use of titles. The omission of a title is likely to be resented. Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Messrs. (never written Mess.) should

always be used unless the addressee has a title, such as Hon., Rev., Dr., Col., or the like. It is always best to use an honorary, professional or academic title when it is held by the addressee. To use a title that is not held by the addressee is likely to give the impression either of inaccuracy or, possibly, of irony. "Esquire" is seldom used today, but if it is used it should be placed after the name and the "Mr." should be omitted.

When the addressee holds more than one title, either the one that is most respected may be used, or else all the titles—for example, "Rev. Dr. Holmes." "The Rev. Dr. Holmes" would be somewhat more formal.

In the headings where the title precedes the name the usage in regard to abbreviations varies. Such titles as Hon., Col., may be used in this abbreviated form or written out when greater formality is desired. Good usage sanctions the use of the abbreviation Rev. and it is only in the most formal communications that the word is written out in full. The titles Hon. and Rev. must be followed either by Mr. or the names or the initials of the persons addressed. The form Rev. Holmes, Hon. Walker, is incorrect. The weight of good usage requires that the title Professor should always be written out and that Dr. should be in this abbreviated form. Where the word "Honorable" is followed, not by the name, but by the official title of the addressee it should be written out in full.

Firm names should be written as they are printed

on the letterhead of the concern that is addressed. The word "The" should precede the firm name unless the writer is sure the firm does not use this word in its title. "Messrs." is seldom used now except in cases when the firm name does not include the word "Company."

8. *Salutations.*—"Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam" is used in nearly all cases when a letter is sent to a person with whom the writer is not personally acquainted. When the addressee is a man and the writer is personally acquainted with him, "Dear Mr. ——" is as often used as "My dear Mr. ——"; but when the addressee is a woman "Dear Miss ——" or "Dear Mrs." is not so often used as the more formal "My dear Miss ——" or "My dear Mrs. ——" even when there is the personal acquaintanceship. "Ladies" is the proper salutation in addressing a firm composed of women. "My dear Sir" and "My dear Madam" are very formal. They are not much used, because they might suggest to many readers a slight degree of coldness and condescension. "Gentlemen," not "Sirs" or "Dear Sirs," is most used in addressing a company or a corporation.

The degree of formality to be observed, which is largely dependent on the degree and kind of personal acquaintanceship existing between writer and addressee, is the chief consideration. The proper salutations, in an order of increasing formality, are: "Dear John" (in a business letter, permissible only in addressing relatives); "Dear Smith"; "Dear Miss

Smith," or "Dear Mrs. Smith"; "Dear Mr. Smith"; "My dear Miss (Mrs. or Mr.) Smith"; "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam" or "Gentlemen"; "My dear Sir" or "My dear Madam"; and "Madam" or "Sir."

In the salutation, Dr. is the only honorary title which is commonly abbreviated, but this is written out if no name follows the title. It is a general rule that if there is no name following the title, the title should be written out as "My dear Colonel," "My dear Professor."

9. *Forms used in writing official letters.*—Letters written to an official of any kind concerning official business are severely formal in form and tone, unless the writer is personally acquainted with the addressee, in which case the letter conforms to ordinary business practice in respect to the degree of formality that it employs. The address is frequently placed at the bottom of the letter, on the left. In formal official correspondence "Sir" is the customary salutation. Titles are always used, and are not abbreviated. Failure to use the correct title distinctly shows either ignorance or neglect of the principles of good form. Honorary degrees may be used. If they appear, they should follow the name and should be abbreviated. Titles of a strictly business nature are written out in full after the name—Mr. John Atkin, General Manager.

While in the formal official letter extreme formality in language and make-up is observed, many feel that it is permissible to include a "human touch" in some part of the letter. For instance, in one case in

which it was necessary to write a request to all the members of a state legislature, it was found that of two letters which were sent the one that was slightly informal secured a much better response. In the more successful letter, the correct address was used on both the letter and the envelop, but the salutation was changed from the strictly correct "Sir" to "My dear Mr. ——." Thus while the address showed plainly that the writer knew the correct form, the less formal salutation suggested that he realized he was addressing an official who was also an individual. Sometimes this desirable human touch may be given by the use of some informal phraseology.

10. *Close of the letter.*—Many correspondents prefer to use "Sincerely" rather than "Yours very truly" as the complimentary close of a business letter to a personal acquaintance, for the same reason that "Dear Mr. Smith" is preferred to "Dear Sir." The use of a concluding phrase, such as "With best wishes," is sometimes desirable; but the tendency is distinctly away from the use of meaningless phrases such, as "We beg to remain" or "We remain."

The three forms, "Yours truly," "Yours very truly," and "Very truly yours," are always safe and correct. It is often best to use "Respectfully yours" or "Yours respectfully" in addressing a person of superior rank, especially in official correspondence. "Cordially" and "Faithfully" are reserved by most people for use in social letters. "Yours for success" or for anything else, is seldom, if ever, a desirable form

of complimentary close. There is a tendency, also, to do away with all participal endings, such as "Hoping that you will see your way clear to accept this offer, we are." Direct forms of the verb, such as "Will you not accept this offer by return mail?" or "We hope you will," etc., are more effective.

Plenty of space should be allowed for the signature when it is placed between the complimentary close and the firm name, or title. The title should be given unless it appears on the letterhead. When the writer has no title, it is best, if he would avoid individual responsibility before the law for what he says in the letter, to sign the firm name first, and below it his own name, preceded by "Per" or "By," preferably "By." The signature should not be preceded by a title, unless the writer is a woman; an unmarried woman may use "Miss" in parenthesis before her name. A married woman may sign her name—Mary Brown—and beneath it write her full married name, in parenthesis—(Mrs. John Lathrop Brown).

11. *Reader's point of view.*—This treatment of mechanical form is, of course, not complete. It would be impossible to make it so within a limited space. It is advisable to be informed on this subject. The addressee expects good form as a matter of course, just as he expects correctness in grammar and rhetoric.

It is well to remember that a conventional form now and then undergoes a change of usage. For example, many business men now prefer to use "My dear Mr. ——" rather than "Dear Mr. ——" in writ-

ing a business letter to a personal friend, while "Dear Sir," which for a while fell into disuse, is today used a great deal, as in former years. It is advisable for the correspondent to keep informed on these and other tendencies of usage. If the letter is sent in reply to one that has been received, it is often best for the writer to use the same salutation as that used in the letter which he is answering. If the letter is not written in answer to another, it always is safest to err on the side of formality rather than on the side of informality.

REVIEW

Why should the correspondent know and use good mechanical form?

When is it safe to ignore customary form?

Mention the requirements of a good letterhead.

How should the heading and the address be punctuated?

Why should the writer give careful attention to titles?

Arrange all customary salutations in the order of the degree of formality that they imply.

Explain the differences between "official" and "unofficial" business letters.

Why are matters of social friendship out of place in business letters?

CHAPTER XVII

GRAMMAR AND RHETORIC

1. *Value of correct English.*—An ignorant or careless use of English is costly. Like correct mechanical form, correct English is not in itself a positive asset in writing effective letters—except in so far as correctness gains clearness—because correct English in the letters we read is also taken as a matter of course. But incorrect English is a positive handicap in nearly all cases.

Therefore it is advisable that a business correspondent be sure that his grammar and his rhetoric are correct; that is, that in expressing his thought he does not violate any of the commonly accepted rules of good usage, such as those covered in any good high school text on Rhetoric or in one of the recent books on business English. Books of both kinds give the same general rules. The books that treat of business English, however, emphasize those rules which are of especial importance in business correspondence. They draw their illustrations from business writing. They treat correctness more from the point of view of its value in gaining effectiveness. Many of these books present vital principles of effectiveness. Therefore a careful study of a good modern book on

business English, especially that part of it which deals with rules of correctness, is well worth while. The best trained correspondent now and then might let technical errors in English creep into his dictation.

2. *Technical and non-technical errors.*—It is not the aim of this chapter to summarize a complete list of the technical errors in English that are frequently found in business correspondence, such as "faulty reference," "dangling modifiers," lack of agreement in case and number, and so on. But because this chapter emphasizes the less technical principles of rhetoric, it is not to be inferred that the more specific and technical rules of grammar and rhetoric may be slighted by the business correspondent. All technical rules are useful in so far as they explain how language may be made a more effective means of conveying thought. And if language is to be a valuable medium of expression, there must be agreement concerning the meaning and arrangement of words and groups of words. Rules are merely the crystallization of the consensus of opinion in this regard—the opinion of those who speak and write well. For clearness of expression, then, the rules of grammar and rhetoric are indispensable. Whether or not these rules were set down in black and white, they are inherent in the very nature of language. They are the fundamental cause of the usefulness of language.

Many grammatical and rhetorical rules concern the expression of the finer shades of meaning. These are the rules that many consider useless. But a knowl-

edge of them is essential to the person who writes important letters that require absolute accuracy and completeness of expression.

3. *Words.*—It has been said that words are live things. Certainly thoughts are live things, and words express thoughts. Deep and accurate thinking can only be done by men whose ability in discriminating the meanings of words is highly developed. An extensive vocabulary is forged on the anvil of necessity by those who think incisively concerning large problems. As a rule, the accurate thinker is a student of words, for accurate thinking requires accurate use of words. Accurate thinking is not the result of an accurate choice of words; it is the cause. In other words, carelessness in the choice of words is the result of careless thinking.

Therefore, the fundamental problem of acquiring a vocabulary and of acquiring the ability to use words most efficiently is that of developing the ability to think deeply and accurately.

4. *Choosing the right word.*—The knack of choosing just the right word to express the exact meaning for the occasion requires, first, that the exact meaning be held clearly in mind; second, that the reader's point of view be clearly held in mind; and third, that the writer have a keen appreciation of the minute differences in the meanings of words—not that he have a large vocabulary, but rather that he be able to make comparatively few and simple words accurately express many of his ideas.

Many first-rate correspondents seem to get along with a second-rate vocabulary, as regards the number of words in it, evidently because such a vocabulary is sufficient for their needs. Their thinking is so clear and direct, and they deal so much in plain statements of fact that they do not need to employ unusual words in expressing their meaning. As a rule, the fewer and the shorter the words necessary to express the thoughts, the better is the thinking for business purposes.

Accuracy of expression requires close discrimination in regard to the meaning of ordinary words. Dictionary definitions are not sufficient. Often the frequent use of a word to express a disagreeable meaning causes that word to carry with it an unpleasant association. The word "conspicuous," for example, is so often used in connection with events or things or persons that make an unfavorable impression that this word has to be carefully used if it is to make a favorable impression, altho neither a dictionary nor a book of synonyms would indicate that this word may possess a disagreeable significance. We are therefore inclined to speak of *marked* rather than *conspicuous* success. This example simply illustrates the fact that words have *current* significance which the correspondent should be able to sense accurately. Frequent use of a good dictionary of synonyms will prove valuable to the writer who wishes to acquire the ability to express fine shades of meaning.

5. *Simplicity in diction.*—Many of the more mod-

ern masters of style in literary English, like Stevenson, Lincoln and Emerson—and even earlier classic English authors like Bunyan, Addison, Steele and Defoe—show a marked tendency toward simplicity in diction and a fine discrimination in the choice of words. The results of clear thinking are nearly always expressed with admirable simplicity of diction. It has already been said, in a preceding chapter, that Abraham Lincoln's letters and speeches are models of direct style which the business correspondent will do well to emulate.

Generally, preference should be given to short, Anglo-Saxon words, but this does not mean that longer words are not to be preferred when they are required for exact expression of the thought. Clearness is the most essential requirement. Constant effort on the part of the correspondent to make his language simple helps him greatly to think clearly and deeply.

Anglo-Saxon diction is preferable even when the addressee is fully capable of understanding Latinized diction, because it always gives an impression of greater sincerity on the part of the writer, and because the thought of the writer can be interpreted more quickly if it is conveyed in short, vivid words. The longer words, while they often permit finer shading of thought, tend to challenge credibility because they are associated with hair-splitting discriminations. Such forms of expression are suitable for legal contracts and, of course, should be used even in business

correspondence when necessary, but few business letters require them. When short words are used, no greater number of words is required than when less simple diction is employed. On the contrary, fewer words are required, because the thought is clearer and therefore more condensed in its expression. Short words and concise expression go together. Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" is a good illustration of this.

6. *Sentence structure.*—A subject of considerable importance in business English is that of sentence structure. The business correspondent should not only be able to distinguish between groups of words that form a complete thought (or a sentence) and groups that do not, but he should also be able to understand clearly all the various relationships that exist between the words, phrases and clauses of which sentences are composed. The main problem in constructing a sentence is to show clearly the right relationship of the parts of the sentence. This requires a logical subordination of ideas—the proper expression of coordinate and subordinate relationships. It is well always to keep in mind the fact that there are numerous connectives in addition to the words "but" and "and." Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that each one of these connective words is designed to indicate a somewhat different kind or degree of relationship from that indicated by any other connective.

A thoro sense of the logical relationship of ideas within a sentence is the prerequisite to the construc-

tion of effective sentences. An increased ability to express these relationships accurately is the main result of a study of rhetoric. Almost any one, no matter how well he may write, can improve his style by studying a good treatise on the kinds of sentences and the varieties of their structure. Mastery of the technic of good sentence structure is a distinct asset in the art of letter-writing.

The present treatment of the subject must be limited to a brief consideration of unity, coherence, and emphasis, which are the terms generally applied to good sentence structure. Like good diction, good sentence structure is the result of the ability to think clearly. This is well emphasized in the summary of a chapter on this subject in a college text on English Composition,[1] part of which is given below:

Obviously, then, everything goes back to the starting point, which is the mind of the writer. In order to write unifiedly, coherently, and emphatically, in order to make your thought appear on paper as single, clear, and forcible, you must form the habit of accurate thinking. It is essential to the whole composition, to the paragraph, to the sentence. In the sentence, which is the smallest unit of thought, it is to be observed with special care. You must cultivate a sense of proportion, learn to estimate values, to recognize shades of meaning. Train your mind to perform these functions, and when you begin to write, the necessary work of construction has already been done. You have only to put down in black and white what has already been completely planned by the faculties of your brain.

[1] "English Composition in Theory and Practice" by Canby and Others, Macmillan (1913), p. 150.

7. *Unity.*—The authorities on grammar and rhetoric say that every sentence must be unified; that is, a sentence must express one complete thought, and all words, phrases, and clauses which are relevant to this central thought and necessary for its completeness, must be included, while all irrelevant ideas must be excluded. The relevancy of any part of a sentence depends upon how closely it is connected with the central thought as well as upon how valuable it is in its relation to the completeness of the central thought.

The business correspondent frequently forgets these facts. There is too often a tendency, in dictating, to string together thoughts that are not closely related to the central idea. This is often due to the habit of using long sentences that contain too many "ands" and "buts"; and this habit, in turn, is due to ignorance or carelessness in regard to the numerous connectives that signify various kinds and degrees of relationship, as already set forth. The fault can really be traced to the lack of clear logical thinking—the failure to discriminate between fine shades of meaning. The following "sentence" furnishes an extreme illustration:

Your order was received on January 1st and we shipped the goods on January 5th and our records show that no other order came in before the 5th but we shall be glad to make sure that your January 1st order is the one we shipped and if not a duplicate shipment will go forward immediately.

A revision of this sentence in accordance with the principle of unity gives us this sentence:

On January 5th we shipped an order received from you on January 1st. Altho our records show that no other order came in before the 5th, we shall be glad to make sure that your January 1st order is the one we shipped. If not, a duplicate shipment will go forward immediately.

It is equally important that closely related clauses and thoughts be included in one sentence. For example, the following "sentences" might better be combined into one unified sentence:

The general supply is low. The market price is now somewhat higher. But we are still selling for immediate shipment a limited quantity at the old price to a few of our old customers.

Applying the principle of unity we get this result:

Altho the market price is now somewhat higher because the general supply is low, we are still selling for immediate shipment a limited quantity at the old price to a few of our old customers.

In this complete thought there is a close casual relationship which, altho implied in the three separate sentences given in the first example, is more clearly expressed when the three sentences are combined into one and the proper connectives are used.

8. *Coherence.*—Coherence is that rhetorical quality which a sentence possesses when the parts are *arranged* in the order which gains the greatest possible

amount of clearness. This quality is more tangible than unity. It may be gained by the application of rules. Perhaps the most general of these rules is this: All qualifying words, phrases, and clauses should be so placed that there will be no doubt as to what part of the sentence they are meant to qualify.

Pronouns and participles are the parts of speech which most frequently give trouble. It should be made perfectly clear to what word, or words, all pronouns and participles refer. Here is an example of vagueness in this respect:

Mr. Jones saw Mr. Smith before he made out his report.

In this case it is doubtful which man "he" and "his" refer to, unless the reader happens to know which man made out the report. In case "he" refers tc Jones, the sentence could be improved by this arrangement:

Before he made out his report, Mr. Jones saw Mr. Smith.

Or another possible arrangement is this:

Mr. Jones, before making out his report, saw Mr. Smith.

Lack of coherence is even better illustrated by a sentence like this:

He is a good executive but only has ten thousand shares of common stock now, eliminating him from control of the business, as long as the other stockholders are combined against him, which is unfortunate for the business.

Here the precise thought to which "eliminating" refers is doubtful. Also, the words "only" and "now"

are not well placed. Coherence would require some such arrangement as follows:

> He is a good executive but now has only ten thousand shares of common stock, a fact which, as long as the other stockholders are combined against him, will eliminate him from control of the business, which is unfortunate for the business.

While the antecedents of the pronouns thruout this revised sentence are now more clearly indicated, the last clause, "which is unfortunate for the business," is a thought which seems to stand apart from the central idea of this sentence; there is consequently a violation of the principle of unity. Greater clearness would be gained if this clause were stated as a separate sentence like this: "It is unfortunate for the business that he is not now in control of it." Or, "His loss of control is unfortunate for the business."

In the revised form of this sentence, words and clauses are placed nearer the word or words to which they are closely connected. "He *only* has ten thousand shares of common stock now" in the original might mean that he alone controls that many shares. "Only" refers to "ten thousand shares" not to "he" or to "has," while "now" modifies "has." As a general rule, modifying words and phrases ought to be placed so that there will be no doubt concerning what they modify. That is the main requirement of coherence, as already stated. Sometimes coherence requires a change in construction rather than a change

in arrangement, like the change from "eliminating" to "a fact which will eliminate."

The diction in the foregoing sentence might be improved. For instance, "but now *controls*" (or *owns,* as the case might be) would be more definite than "has," while "*will keep* him from control of the business" gives the intended meaning more exactly than "will eliminate."

Still further revision, with a view toward securing more exact expression of the meaning, would produce this form:

> Altho he is a good executive, all the other stockholders are combined against him. Since the common stock he now owns —only ten thousand shares—is not a majority, he will lose control of the business. This will be unfortunate for the business.

9. *Emphasis.*—The principle of emphasis, if properly applied, also helps the writer to make his meaning clear, and arrangement is one means of applying this principle. An emphatic sentence is a sentence so constructed that each of the various ideas is given its proper importance. The two most emphatic positions for words are the beginning and the end of a sentence. Within the sentence, the most emphatic position is immediately before a long pause; the longer the pause, the more emphatic the position. Sometimes emphasis is gained by making a separate sentence of a statement instead of making it one part of a long sentence. The last revision of the long sen-

tence quoted in the preceding section will illustrate this point. Another illustration is to be found in the unrevised quotation in Section 7, which reads as follows:

> The general supply is low. The market price is now somewhat higher. But we are still selling for immediate shipment a limited quantity at the old price to a few of our old customers.

In this quotation, the fact that the general supply is low is emphasized by being placed in a separate sentence. To make a separate paragraph of it would give it still greater emphasis. The combination of these three sentences into one, as is done for the sake of unity, tends to throw greater emphasis on the fact that a limited quantity is offered at the old price. Yet, if the writer desires to emphasize the fact that the old price is made *notwithstanding* the fact that the market conditions of supply and price are what they are, probably it is better to have the three separate statements than the one sentence. The logical relationship between the three statements is apparent without the aid of connectives. Thus always the *impression* desired governs the application of rhetorical principles.

The last of the three sentences quoted above affords a good illustration of emphasis. If it were desired to give greater emphasis in this sentence to the fact that this price is being made only to a few old customers of the house, and if at the same time it were desired to give greater emphasis to the fact that a

limited quantity is offered at the old price, the sentence should be worded like this:

> But to a few of our old customers we are still selling for immediate shipment a limited quantity at the old price.

But if "for immediate shipment" were the idea to be emphasized, this phrase should be placed in a more emphatic position—at the end.

Emphasis is of great importance in business letters. If it is to be secured, a sentence must be so constructed that the important ideas will be readily apparent to the reader. Emphasis lends force to the main points. It is the mechanical substitute for the variation in sharpness and stress of tone used by the salesman in his selling talk, altho the speaker, as well as the writer, can make use of arrangement in securing proper emphasis. Emphasis is also gained by employing repetition and by giving a considerable amount of space to the important ideas, as well as by mechanical display, the use of underscoring, capital letters, italics, red ink, and so on.

10. *Paragraph structure.*—Paragraph structure is of less importance in business correspondence than sentence structure. The business correspondent does not follow literary usage so closely in constructing his paragraph as he does in constructing his sentence. Yet he can learn much from rhetorical treatments of this subject. Paragraphs are complete units of composition. They serve to separate independent thoughts that have been sufficiently developed to

stand alone. The indented first line or the double spacing that indicates the beginning of a new paragraph warns the reader that a change of thought is at hand. It also gives him a resting place, and an opportunity to comprehend the completed thought. Paragraphs divide the body of a letter into its logical parts for the reader's convenience.

The principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis apply also in good paragraph structure, but are frequently set aside in the composition of the business letter. Yet it is well for a business correspondent to know what constitutes good paragraph structure, the various methods of construction, the importance of keeping to one definite subject in each paragraph, the art of arranging and connecting sentences within the paragraph so that they are closely connected (coherence) and are therefore easy for the reader to follow, and the arrangement by which emphasis is properly distributed. A knowledge of all these aspects of paragraph structure is of practical value.

The tendency in modern business correspondence is in the direction of literary standards of construction. Paragraphs in business letters are comparatively short however, yet each should be unified and should stand alone as representing a complete thought. It is often advisable to make a paragraph of a single short sentence for the sake of emphasis. Short paragraphs make the letter attractive and easy to read, but paragraphs in business letters are not

made short primarily for this purpose. The business letter goes directly to the point, is concise, deals in plain facts, and therefore lends itself better than literary composition to comparatively short paragraphs. There is, however, no essential difference between good paragraphs in English literature and good paragraphs in business letters.

11. *Grammar and rhetoric are specialized subjects.* —There are many important principles of good sentence and paragraph structure in addition to those mentioned in this and preceding sections. Facility in the art of constructing sentences which clearly convey the writer's meaning, and which make the impression desired, is increased if the writer makes a thoro study of the rhetorical principles of good sentence structure.

Grammar and rhetoric are highly specialized subjects; therefore, as in the case of the more technical aspects of credits and collections, any extensive treatment of the rules of grammar and rhetoric would be outside the range of the subject of this volume, which is written with the assumption that the reader knows how to write a correct letter. Yet correctness, broadly speaking, is a matter of degree. The more nearly correct a letter is from the standpoint of grammar and rhetoric, the better its chance for success, other things being equal. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, has been to arouse interest in a study of grammar and rhetoric. When studied with the end in view of gaining a sharper tool with

which to carve out more effective letters, grammar and rhetoric are not dry subjects, especially as they are treated in modern books on business English.

The author's intention has been to point out some of the more important habits of thought and practice of many expert correspondents in plying their art, for effective letter-writing is a process of thinking. Back of good writing for business purposes is good thinking, always—thinking from the reader's point of view.

REVIEW

What is the importance of a knowledge of the principles of grammar and rhetoric for the business correspondent?

How can a good vocabulary be acquired? How can one become skilled in choosing the right word?

What aspects of sentence structure are important?

State the principles of unity, coherence and emphasis in their application to sentences and paragraphs.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUSINESS REPORTS

1. *Purpose of the business report.*—Business reports are usually prepared for a very definite and practical purpose at the request of some individual or some organization that possesses authority to act on the information given or the recommendations made in the report. It is advisable that the writer of the report not only keep constantly in mind his own purpose in making the report, but also that he be sure that he knows definitely what ultimate use the concern will make of it. He must be careful, however, not to allow his knowledge of the ultimate use of his data to influence him to hand in any information that is not entirely accurate. It is by this knowledge that the writer of the report must guide himself in collecting data, in analyzing and arranging facts, and in deciding what form the report shall take and what the expression shall be.

Why is this report wanted? is, then, an important question. If a complete and accurate answer can be secured before the report is begun, it will be of great value in the work of preparation. Now and then, however, in order to make it more certain that a disinterested and unbiased report will be submitted, a concern will prefer not to answer this question until

after the report has been turned in. As a rule, it is good policy for a firm to give all the information it can, from the beginning, since the more the report-maker knows concerning the concern's needs, conditions and policies, the better equipped is he to work intelligently for the best interests of the business, and the more likely is it that his report will be satisfactory from the standpoint both of substance and of style.

There is no fixed form for a good business report. Reports vary in form and method, contents, arrangement, and so on, primarily according to differences in purpose. Yet there are many features which characterize all reports. It is the aim of this chapter to point out some of the more general requirements that apply in all kinds of report-making—technical or non-technical, personal or impersonal, scientific, economic, descriptive, narrative or expositive.

2. *Gathering data.*—No matter what kind of report is to be made, its purpose will determine the character of the information that must be gathered. If that purpose is to recommend improvement in the operation of a department, the report might include information concerning the following: present conditions in the department, both favorable and unfavorable, and the causes of these conditions; past conditions, the causes that occasioned them; a forecast of what the results will be if present conditions continue; and recommendations of changes that would bring about the desired improvement. The amount and

character of information that should be included depends, of course, upon the ultimate purpose that the report is to serve. In many cases, the report need be only a series of recommendations concerning the improvement of a condition the existence of which is well known to the receiver of the report; in other cases, it need merely make an impartial and impersonal statement of facts, without any conclusion or recommendations—when that best serves the purpose. But in most cases a report consists of definite recommendations backed up with sufficient data to give the reader not only a clear idea of the reasons for the recommendations, but also a basis for judging their reliability and their practicability.

Gathering and selecting data that will serve as the basis for a good report is often the most difficult part of report making. This problem involves all the principles applied in statistical research, which is highly specialized work. The report-maker aims to secure detailed and accurate information concerning the conditions and circumstances in any case, and to summarize the facts principally for purposes of comparison—in order that they may serve as dependable premises on which accurate conclusions may be based.

The most important considerations in gathering data are completeness and accuracy. Incompleteness of data may be in the kinds of facts gathered or in the number of cases considered. That is, certain facts which would help the concern form its conclu-

sions are not considered, or a generalization is made before sufficient cases have been considered to make sure of the application of the law of averages. Inaccuracies may occur in observation of the facts, in their tabulations, or in their classification. The receiver of the report will find it valuable to possess a knowledge of the sources of information on which reports are based, and of tests that may be used to check the accuracy of that information. Such information of the sources of data and tests for accuracy is often included in the report, usually in the introduction, or in the form of foot-notes in connection with each unit of data the accuracy of which might be questioned.

3. *Preliminary outline.*—Careful analysis of the problem involved in the report is best made in the form of a logical outline. This outline virtually constitutes a table of contents of the report. The outline form is often drawn up before the information necessary to fill it in is obtained. It is the bird's-eye view of the report, which indicates clearly the broadest divisions into which the report itself is divided. The subdivision of the report into all its details requires, of course, keen appreciation of the purpose of the report.

If an official of a company were asked to prepare for the president or a board of directors in any business a report designed to throw as much light as possible on the problem of improving correspondence thruout the organization, his preliminary outline might contain the following broad divisions:

I. Present Conditions
II. Possible Improvements
III. Best Means of Obtaining Improvements.

What are present conditions? is, logically, the first question to be answered. Even tho the reporter knows a great deal about present conditions, he must make sure that he knows them well enough to criticize them constructively. Thoro acquaintance with present conditions is the first step, and it is a very important one. General impressions concerning conditions are not sufficient; they must be verified. The reporter must do as little guessing as possible about actual conditions. He must look for excellences as well as faults in the present system. When making an investigation he usually finds what he looks for. Unless he looks for good points as well as bad points, and for the causes of both good and bad conditions, a one-sided view of the case results and improvements cannot be so well planned. Improvements must be based upon whatever is good as well as bad in the system that is being investigated.

The questionnaire method is a good means of getting information about present conditions. In this case one sets down on paper a set of pertinent questions to which written answers are to be given by members of the organization who are best qualified to answer or he can have personal conferences with these members. In general, the less the report-maker is dependent on others for his information, the better,

because "others" are seldom free from a desire to make a good showing, and because these same "others" are often the originators of faults in the present system.

Given the broad, general divisions of a report, as above suggested, the construction of the permanent outline then becomes a process of logical analysis or classification. It is very important that the report be unified and that the proper proportion be observed —that the less important parts be properly subordinated and that the more important parts be given due prominence.

4. *Analyzing the data.*—Just as the purpose of the entire report serves to suggest the broad divisions, so the purpose of each main division suggests its subdivisions. Present conditions must be thoroly known in order to make any changes for the better. In the case under discussion, improvement lies in two general directions: lowering the cost of handling the correspondence, and increasing the effectiveness of the letters. Immediately certain pertinent questions about present conditions are suggested. What is the cost of handling the correspondence? How does this cost compare with that in other businesses? How does the cost of correspondence in one department of this business compare with the cost in other departments? What are the main items of cost in the handling of the correspondence? How do these items of cost compare with the cost of similar items in other departments and in other business houses? And thus,

by the question method, the problem of cost is analyzed with a view to finding out whether it may be lowered, and if so, where and how. Then questions of a similar nature are asked concerning the effectiveness of the correspondence. Are the letters effective or not? Why, or why not? On what tests does the answer rest? What are the results of the various types of letters written in the different departments? How do these results compare with those of similar letters written by other concerns? If there is any difference, what is the explanation? What, in general, constitutes an effective letter? What are the most important considerations in effective letter-writing? What is the correspondence department's weakness and what is its strength?

Such questions would be the basis of the investigation of conditions, and these questions suggest the main subdivisions of the report, which might be somewhat like the following:

I. Present conditions
  A. General statement of the correspondence methods
  B. General statement of cost
  C. Effectiveness analyzed
    1. Favorable criticisms
      a. General
      b. Types of letters
      c. Departments
    2. Unfavorable criticisms
      a. General
      b. Types of letters
      c. Departments

D. Cost analyzed
  1. Where the cost is low
    a. General
    b. Types of letters
    c. Departments
  2. Where the cost is high
    a. General
    b. Types of letters
    c. Departments

II. Improvements suggested
  A. General improvements
  B. Departments, or types of letters

III. "Best Means of Obtaining Improvements" would then consist of definite recommendations of the action considered necessary to effect the improvements suggested in Part II.

The second and third main divisions depend for their detailed contents, of course, upon the findings that are set down in the first division.

5. *Contents of the report.*—The completed outline that covers all phases of the investigation and of the findings, does not necessarily constitute a good outline of the report itself as it should finally be presented. The final outline includes only such matter as is necessary for the contents of a report which adequately fulfils its fundamental purpose.

Before the report is written, it is well to make sure that the final outline is adequate. Usually the first draft of this outline ought to be thoroly revised. The revision of the outline of a good business report consists, generally speaking, of adding material neces-

sary to promote the success of the report, and of cutting out material that is unnecessary from the point of view of the person or persons to whom the report may go. There must often be rearrangement of the material if the report is to accomplish its purpose. The logical arrangement adopted in solving the problem involved in the report is not always the most effective arrangement for the report itself. Often it is advisable to state recommendations or conclusions at some place other than at the end of the report; at the beginning, for instance, or in the body of the report following the discussion of the conditions which in the opinion of the writer call for a remedy.

Thus, there is usually considerable difference between the preliminary outline of a business report, which is designed primarily to help the maker of the report, and the outline that is finally presented. That is why thoro revision of the preliminary outline is essential if the results of the investigation are to be made as effective as possible. Another aim of revision is to insure unity, coherence, and proper emphasis.

6. *Form and expression.*—The arrangement of a business report is usually designed to economize the reader's time. Clear analysis and careful arrangement of the contents, together with simple expression and clear-cut mechanical display, are the principal means to this end. Headings and subheadings are inserted, and are distinctly displayed. Form and expression are adapted to the reader in as many ways

as possible in order to gain the greatest clearness and convenience.

Adaptation to the reader may also include the "human touches" that add interest—the kind so often found in salesmen's reports. The degree of personal tone to be used in a report depends on the dignity of the subject and the occasion of the report—and especially upon the official position of the receiver and the business relationship that exists between the maker and the receiver of the report. Not all reports need be impersonal in tone, but in nearly every case the style should be formal and dignified, and the presentation should be strictly to the point. As a rule, the shorter and the more to the point the report is made, the better it serves its purpose. The outline report is favored by most executives. When this kind is used, figures and facts of a statistical nature are tabulated, and for comparative purposes are often presented by means of diagrams and charts.

7. *Introduction.*—The main title, which clearly defines the subject of the report and sometimes expresses its purpose, may be followed by an introduction in which may be given the authority by which the report is made. This is a more comprehensive statement of the subject of the report—including any limitations of the field covered, or any specific point of view adopted—and the methods pursued in gathering material and the sources of data used. The introduction may also emphasize the importance of any part of the report or any particular recommenda-

tion; in short, the introduction to a business report, which is usually written after the report has been made up, may include any kind of information which the writer feels would be of value and interest before the report itself is read. Many business reports are saved from misinterpretation and are made more effective by the right kind of introduction. Long introductions, however, are seldom necessary; usually a statement of authorization is sufficient.

8. *Body.*—In the body of the report there should be as little detail as possible. The amount will depend upon how necessary it is to substantiate any information on which conclusions or generalizations are based, or to demonstrate the feasibility or practicability of constructive recommendations. If the writer is willing to take full responsibility for his recommendations, all he needs to include in his report are these recommendations, provided he knows that they will be accepted and acted upon favorably. But even then, it is usually best to include at least a summary of the writer's reasons for his recommendations. It is good salesmanship for even a superior officer to include in his report to the men under him the reasons for his "instructions," as the report would be called in this case, altho there is not much difference fundamentally between instructions to inferiors and a report to superiors.

Inasmuch as nearly all reports that include recommendations are written by men who must convince the receiver that the recommendations ought to be

adopted, there is considerable chance for exercising good salesmanship in the body of a business report, not salesmanship of the emotional or argumentative type, perhaps, but the kind of salesmanship involved in placing the right facts in the right arrangement and display, and with the right kind of expression, before the "buyer," so that he will at once be strongly inclined to accept the recommendations. As a rule the greater the degree of good salesmanship exercised in getting out a report—in other words, the more accurately the writer takes the reader's point of view and anticipates what kind of report will best serve the interests of the receiver—the better will be the report, at least from the standpoint of effectiveness if not from the standpoint of correctness.

To say that the body of such a report ought to be so constructed that it gives only such information as is necessary to make the report complete for its purpose, and so presented that the reader's time will be economized as much as possible, is about as far as it is safe to go in laying down any general principles. A report is a service. The advisability of individual adaptation to the needs of its receiver, which vary with each case, makes it unwise to recommend a model form of report.

9. *Conclusions and recommendations.*—It has been said that a satisfactory report is a good piece of salesmanship. Careful consideration of the reader's interests is the foundation of the kind of workmanship that produces a good report. Salesmanship, there-

fore, has as much to do with success in making a business report, as it has with success in any other kind of business activity. "Salesmanship," as used here, means the art of causing another person to think or feel or act as we desire. It is well for the maker of a report to bear this in mind. Whether or not he makes any definite recommendations, he has the opportunity to put himself actually in the place of the receiver of his report and, taking his point of view, so analyze and arrange and present the desired information that his report will yield maximum satisfaction.

Good salesmanship on the part of the maker of a report will first prevent him from making recommendations that really ought not to go thru, and second, will enable him to get thru recommendations that really ought to be adopted. He will not, for instance, make the mistake of appearing to be over-eager that any of his recommendations be approved, because the expression of over-eagerness suggests possible haste and doubt, and unwillingness to let the reader make a voluntary decision in regard to the action recommended.

Thus do many of the same ideas which apply to the writing of effective letters apply also to the writing of effective business reports. In fact, a business report is essentially a business letter, and often takes that form. A business report that begins with a statement like this, "I hope the board will see fit to approve the recommendations made in this report," and ends with a similar expression of hope, has about the

same unfavorable effect on the receiver of the report as have such requests at the beginning and end of letters. It is best to inject the kind of stuff into the body of the report that makes such requests unnecessary. The suggestion of the report-maker's confidence that his recommendations will be approved is better gained by a complete, yet terse, definite, and fearless statement of his recommendations.

Many recommendations are not approved because the maker of them failed to anticipate resistances that were sure to be offered to their adoption. Resistance often takes the form of doubt concerning the results of the action recommended, or concerning some difficulty that would be involved in carrying out the recommendations. Such resistances are usually met in the body of the report, but it is often advisable either to meet them again when the recommendation is made at the end of the report; or to make the recommendation at the place in the report where it will be least likely to meet with resistance, or else to refer back to the sections in the report where the resistance is met.

In a report on improving the efficiency of correspondence in an office, for instance, the means of making the improvements suggested might well follow an enumeration of possible improvements, and might immediately precede definite, concise and simple statements of recommendation. The failure to see just how recommendations may be carried out often prevents the receiver from accepting them. Thus

the preliminary outline suggested in Section 3 seems to be a fairly good general arrangement for the final form of the report. In fact, this arrangement was used in a report for a wholesale house and a general outline of it is quoted in the following section.

10. *Specimen report.*—The following quotations are taken from a report which was based on an investigation which covered a period of one year. The report is too long to quote as a whole, but enough of it is given to illustrate the main features of a good business report. The introduction to this report reads as follows:

February 1, 1916.

To the Board of Directors,
The —— Company,
Gentlemen:

The following report was prepared at the request of the President of the —— Company, whose letter of request, dated January 10, 1915, reads as follows:

> *My dear Mr. ——:*
>
> The Board of Directors of this company feels that we are not paying enough attention to our correspondence, that we could do many things to improve the letters that go out from this house without adding to the cost of them. We have no definite records of the cost of correspondence. But our main problem is to increase the efficiency of all letters that go out.
>
> From now on, therefore, will you please give all the time you can take for it to the solution of this problem. Get thoroly acquainted with the situation in all departments and from all angles, and let us have a full report of present conditions and possible improvements, together with definite recommendations.
>
> Yours very truly,

This report includes the findings of an investigation which had extended over a period of twelve months, since January 10, 1915. Careful records of cost have been kept in each department and numerous tests of efficiency have been applied. The nature and results of these records and tests are set forth in the first part of this report. The second part of the report, beginning on page 28, suggests possible improvements; the third part, beginning on page 33, is a complete statement of the means of gaining those improvements, with careful estimates of costs and results; while the fourth part, beginning on page 45, is a statement of definite recommendations.

The undersigned author of this report has secured the cooperation of the heads of all departments in its preparation, each one of whom has read and approved the recommendations herein made. The report therefore represents the combined findings and judgment of all department heads, whose hearty cooperation in carrying out its recommendations is assured.

Respectfully yours,

Then follows the title page, which bears a complete and definite statement of the subject of the report, carefully placed in the center of the page. It reads:

A Report on the Present Conditions of the Cost and Efficiency of Correspondence in the —— Company; Recommendations of Improvements; and Suggestions of the Means of Carrying Out These Recommendations, with Estimates of the Costs and Results.

Submitted to the Board of Directors of the —— Company, February 1, 1916. Prepared by ——.

Pages 2 and 3 following this title page present a complete table of contents in outline form. The main divisions and subdivisions of this outline follow:

Present Conditions (General)
- General estimate of efficiency
- Methods of judging efficiency
- General estimate of cost
- Methods of finding cost
- What is being done to improve correspondence

Present Conditions (by Departments)
- Order Department
- Traffic Department
- Complaint Department
- Credit Department
- Sales Department
- Merchandise-buying correspondence
- Interdepartment correspondence

Improvements
- What has been done in the past
- General supervision of correspondence
- Training correspondents
- Training stenographers
- Better systems

Means of Gaining Improvements; Their Cost and Results
- A manager of correspondence
  - Type of man needed
  - His functions
  - Cost
- Methods of training correspondents
  - Conferences
  - Classes
  - Manuals
  - Cost
  - Results
- Methods of training stenographers and typists
  - Standards
  - Supervision
  - Manual

Cost
Results
Cost-cutting mechanical systems and devices
Cost-cutting methods
Form paragraphs and letters
Standardized methods

Recommendations

Appoint a general manager or superintendent of correspondence.
Define his duties.
As soon as consistent with good work, have him put thru as many of the improvements herein suggested as are deemed advisable; and let him suggest and put thru additional improvements which are approved by the President of this company.
Let him supervise the employment and training of correspondents, stenographers and typists, in cooperation with the general office manager.
Make him responsible to the President of this company for the cost and efficiency of correspondence thruout this business.
Make an appropriation of at least $6,000, exclusive of the salary of the supervisor of correspondence, to be used in defraying the cost of improvements which require outside purchases.

Thus the recommendations for action are definite, few, and simple, and they follow the reasons why they should be carried out. From the standpoint of good salesmanship, it is possible that if "results" had been placed before "cost" the section on Improvements might have been better.

In the body of this report as it was written, all divisions were clearly marked off by headings, which were so worded that they clearly indicated the subject mat-

ter of the division. Page numbers followed the divisions of the foregoing outline.

REVIEW

Explain the fundamental purpose of a business report and the most important requirements in gathering data.

What is the purpose of the preliminary outline?

How are the contents of a report selected? What point of view controls the analysis of data?

Why and how revise the final outline?

What, in general, constitutes good form and expression in the introduction and in the body of the report?

In general, what constitutes a good business report and what is the chief factor in its success?

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